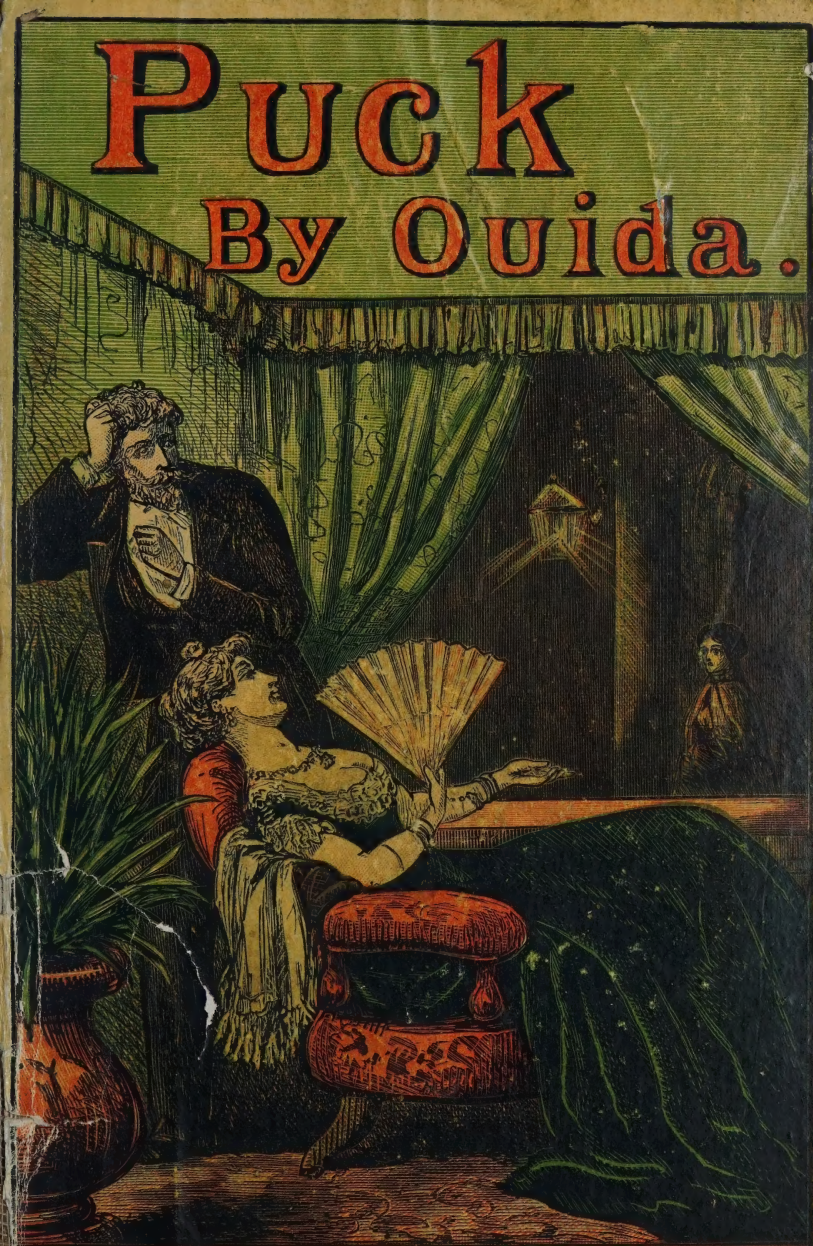
Puck

By Ouida.



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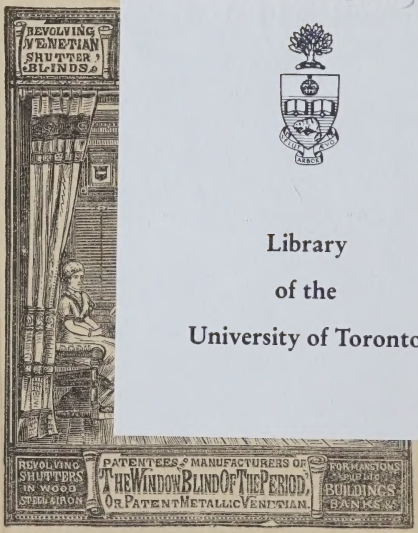
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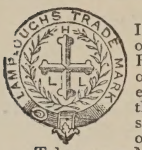

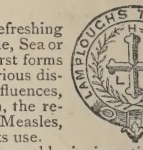

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DEDICATED

TO

A Faithful Friend and a Gallant Gentleman,

SULLA FELIX.

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PUCK.

INTRODUCTION.

HIS FIRST PAPER.

I AM only a dog.

I find in all autobiographies which I have ever heard read that it is considered polite to commence with self-appreciation. But for all that I do not consider myself the inferior of any living creature: I never heard of any autobiographist that did consider himself so. According to their own account they are all *incompris;* and I suppose I was also; for I was always held in contempt as a 'dumb brute.' Nobody, except that wise woman, Rosa Bonheur, ever discerned that animals only do not speak because they are endowed with a discretion far and away over that of blatant, bellowing, gossiping, garrulous Man.

'Only a dog,' indeed! However, the phrase has a pretty, modest, graceful look, so let it stand. Men never are taken at their own valuation by others; and so I suppose dogs cannot expect to be either.

'Only a dog!' Well dogs cannot lie, or bribe, or don a surplice, or pick a lock, or go bull-baiting in share-markets, or preside as chairmen over public companies; we can only, if we are dishonest, run off with a bone in a most open and foolish fashion, and get instantly whipped for our pains. So that there is one art, at least, in which men are decidedly in advance of us; and in deference to that super-excellence in stealing I beg again to state, in my humility, that I am only a Dog.

Such a little dog too. I can go in a muff with a scent-bottle, or in a coat-pocket with a meerschaum. I am very white, very woolly, very pretty indeed; covered all over with snowy curls, and having two bright black eyes and a black shiny tip to my nose like patent leather. I have heard myself delared a thousand times to be 'thoro'-bred;' but I really do not feel any more sure of my paternity than the public can be of the authorship of a prince's periods or a bishop's charge. I have in my own mind very patrician doubts as to my father; and can, with truly aristocratic haziness, trace my ancestry up to an O.

I have studied life, I assure you; and widely too, though I am only a tiny Maltese. I am called Maltese, you know, though I never saw Malta, just as our nobles are called Norman though they do not own an acre of land in Normandy.

I have studied life; we little cupids usually belong to the fair sex; and for a vantage-point from which to survey all the tricks and trades, the devilries, and the frivolities, the sins and the shams, the shifts and the scandals of this world of yours, commend me to a cosy nook under a woman's laces!

I remember once hearing a big Alp-dog and a small King Charles disputing with one another as to which knew best the world and all its wickedness. Mont Blanc narrated most thrilling adventures among the snows of his birth-place, told how he had rescued travellers from midnight death, and dug a child out of an icy grave, and guarded a lonely old château through a whole dreary Swiss winter; and wound up by declaring that he must have seen the game of life best since he had once belonged to poor Grammont Caderousse, and now lived with a Guardsman who had rooms in Mount-street, where they played hazard till the dawn was up, and told all the naughtiest stories that were about on the town.

Little Charlie heard patiently, shivering at the mention of snow, then winked his brown eye when Mont Blanc talked of his Guardsman.

'My dear Alp,' said he, 'I see a trick more than you for all that; for I live with the ladies. As for your owner in Mount-street,—a fico for him! Why—*I belong to the woman that ruins him!*'

The coterie of dogs that was listening declared the little fellow had won. Mont Blanc lived in the sphere of the tricked; Charlie in the land of the tricksters. Ice might be cold, but

not so cold as the souls of *cocottes*; chicken-hazard might be perilous, but not so perilous as the ways of *cocodettes*.

You must be spider or fly, as somebody says. Now all my experience tells me that men are mostly the big, good-natured, careless blue-bottles, half drunk with their honey of pleasure, and rushing blindly into any web that dazzles them a little in the sunshine; and women are the dainty, painted, patient spiders that just sit and weave, and weave, and weave, till—pong!—Bluebottle is in head foremost, and is killed, and sucked dry, and eaten up at leisure.

You men think women do not know much of life. Pooh! I, Puck, who have dwelt for many of my days on their boudoir cushions, and eaten of their dainty little dinners, and been smuggled under their robes even into opera, balls, and churches, tell you that it is an utter fallacy. They do not choose you to know that they know it, very probably; but there is nothing that is hidden from them, I promise you.

They were very good to me on the whole (except that they would generally overfeed me one day, and forget to feed me at all the next), and I do not want to speak against them; but if ever Metempsychosis whisk my little soul into a man's body, hang me if I will not steer clear of my ladies!—that's all.

For viewing life,—all its cogs, and wheels, and springs,—there is nothing so well as to be a lady's pet dog. To see the pretty creatures quarrel with their mirrors, and almost swear over their hairdressing, and get into a passion because the white powder insists on resting in little tell-tale patches, and sit pondering grimly for an hour over the debatable question of more or less rouge; and then to trot down on the edge of their trailing skirts, and go beside them as they sweep into the drawing-room, radiant with smiles, and brilliant for conquest, and hear them murmur prettiest welcome to the rivals whom they could slaughter were only their fan a dagger. Why, there is nothing in the world beats that for comedy!

Ah! you scowl at this, and say 'What a dissolute dog is this Puck; he has lived with Phryne, and Lias, and all of them!' Not at all, my good sir, not a bit of it. I have had mistresses in all classes of society; I have dwelt with peasants as well as with peeresses; and on my honor I have belonged to young girls that rouged like any lorette, and to matrons that intrigued like any courtesan; and I have seen as genuine spurts of spiteful chagrin, or impulsive good-nature, in the

greenroom as in the schoolroom, and as matchless pieces of impudent acting in the saloon as on the stage. '*Souvent femme varie;*' well, I don't think it (though they were always variable about my meals); I have found female nature very much the same all the world over. And a dog knows as a man cannot know; when 'only a dog' is with her, she *thinks* she is all alone, you see!

You fear I am *blasé* and cynical? Perhaps I am. My curls fall off a good deal, and I am forced to have my food cut up in a mincing-machine; the world naturally looks dark to us all when we come to this. But I have very often found living agreeable enough, even though I have lived sufficiently long to realise what Brummel left at Calais: and I *have* met noble women without rouge, and with truth on their tongues. I have! And when I met them, I admired them, I loved them, as your dogs (and men) of the world always do, with an astonished reverential admiration that your country bumpkins, your ungenerous youths, never feel.

We are ill appreciated, we cynics; on my honor, if cynicism be not the highest homage to Virtue there is, I should like to know what Virtue wants. We sigh over her absence and we glorify her perfections. But Virtue is always a trifle stuck-up, you know, and she is very difficult to please.

She is always looking uneasily out of the 'tail of her eye' at her opposition leader, Sin, and wondering why Sin dresses so well and drinks such very good wine. We 'cynics' tell her that under Sin's fine clothes there is a breast cancer-eaten, and at the bottom of the wine there is a bitter dreg called satiety: but virtue does not much heed that; like the woman she is, she only notes that Sin drives a pair of ponies in the sunshine, while she herself is often left to plod wearily through the everlasting falling rain. So she dubs us 'cynics' and leaves us—who can wonder if we won't follow her through the rain? Sin smiles so merrily if she makes us pay toll at the end; whereas Virtue—ah me, Virtue *will* find such virtue in frowning!

However, I fear I am getting a trifle too French-Memoir-esque, all epigram and no memoir. Living so much in the cream of society I have got a good deal of its froth. It is not wit, but it passes very well for it—over a dinner-table. Put down in black and white you may find it a trifle frivolous. As for printing wit—even my wit—you might just

as well talk of petrifying a *vanille soufflé*. So I am afraid even I may seem dull sometimes; and I have as great a horror of seeming stupid as of seeming edifying.

How I hate that last word. It always brings to my memory a gentle dean who preached most divine platitudes, but invariably trod on my tail. I recollect the reverend gentleman had a playful habit too of pitching biscuits at me, which, when my innocent mouth opened for them, burnt it with a horrid hidden dab of mustard. And he tricked an old commissionaire too, who once took me about, out of a shilling for a message. By the way, commissionaires hate to do work for the cloth. 'Nobody else cuts 'em down so close to a penny as them parsons,' they will always tell you. What we poor dogs have lost by being shut out of church by the beadles!

But I am running out of my autobiographical track again, just as Montespan and Bussy Rabutin, and all of them always do. I will try and hark back again to my earliest reminiscences. They are humble ones, I must admit. The world always feels a savage pleasure in tracing its Shakespeares into a butcher's shop, and its Voltaires into an attorney's office, and its great men generally into paternal pigsties; it is a set-off to it for their disagreeable superiority. So it will be at once familiar and soothing to it to learn that I—the spoiled pet and idol of its oligarchy—first consciously opened my eyes in a cottage. You see I am as thoroughly honest as Rousseau in his *Confessions*.

Poor Jean Jacques! he only got called a scoundrel for his pains. I wonder where the man is who, telling the naked truth about himself, would not get called so?

Polite lies, polite lies! They are the decorous garment and the fitting food of the world. To be in the fashion, I shall have to treat you to them before I have done. But at the present moment I feel truthful. I am aware of the vulgarity of the admission; but I make it—I feel truthful.

So here is the account of my earliest home.

CHAPTER I.

HIS FIRST MEMORY.

THE first thing I distinctly remember is lying on some straw, in a wooden bed, and hearing the sound of voices above.

'Do'ee think 't'll live?' said one, the full gay voice of a girl.

'It 'll dew,' said the slow soft tones of a man. 'Git a bit o' summat softer, lass; the straw, it do nashen of him.'

The straw was truly nashing of me—North-English for pricking and hurting me; and I took a liking to the man for his thoughtfulness accordingly. The summat softer came, in the shape of an old wool kerchief; and he laid me gently on it, put me in the warmth of the sun, and fed me with some new milk. It was the man who did all this: the girl stood looking on amused.

'How came 'ee to be gi'en him, Ben? she asked, with her hand on her side.

'It seems as mother's dead,' he responded;—my mother he meant, I found afterwards. 'And pups was such a trouble like to kip i' the quick, that up a' the Hall they'd no away wi' em, and Jack he was a-goin' to put this little un i' the water. It's the last o' the litter. "Gi' he to me, Jack," says I; and he gi'ed him. "He's o' rare walue," says Jack, "but he wunna live." "I dunno 'bout walue," says I. "He's no bigger than a kit; but he 'ull ha' a squeak for life anyhow wi' me." And I tuk him. Poor beastie, he's o' walue surely i' God's sight!'

The girl's eyes sparkled.

'M'appen we might sell him after a bit? she cried eagerly.

I shivered where I lay: already I was regarded as a goods and chattel, purchasable, marketable, and without a vote in the sale! Mark you: it was a woman first proposed my barter. It may have coloured all my subsequent views of the sex; I do not deny it.

'Nay,' said the man in his slow gentle voice. 'A drop o' milk's all he 'ull cost awhiles—we shanna be harmed i' that— and he'll grow to us, and we'll grow to him belikes. Dogs are main and faithful. Look at auld Trust.

It 'ull be time eno' to talk o' turnin' this'n out o' door when he have misbehave hisself. I likes the looks on him.'

'But Jack told 'ee he was worth summat?' urged the girl impatiently. 'It was the old madam brought them wee white dogs to the Hall first o' all, and they allus said as how those little uns 'ud fetch their own weight i' gold.'

The man shook his head a little sadly.

'Ah, ye allus thinks too much o' gold, my lass,' he said with a soft reproach.

She laughed a little fiercely.

'We ha' got so much, to be sure!'

'We ha' got eno',' said he, with a patience very gentle, and a little dogged. 'We ha' got bit and drop, and hearth fire, and roof tree. We ha' got eno'.'

She gave a peevish, passionate twist to her dress; it was woollen, homespun, and without grace or beauty.

He saw the gesture, and rose from his knees beside my bed.

'There was a dead woman found o' Moorside yesternight,' he said quietly. 'And the bones were thro' the skin; she's been clammed along o' want o' mill-work. You han't got to ga ta mill, lassie.'

The rebuke was a very gentle one; but it displeased her. She stood silent, in a yellow breadth of sunlight streaming in through the leaded lattice of the long, lancet-shaped, creeper-shaded window.

She was very lovely, this girl—strong, and lithe, and tall, with a cloud of hair that would have glistened like bronze with a little care, and great brown sleepy eyes that yet could flash and glitter curiously, and a handsome, pouting, ruddy mouth.

She wore a russet-coloured skirt that reached scarce below her knees, and a yellow kerchief over her white full breast, and in her ears she had two tawdry brass rings and drops, and a string of red glass beads round her throat. She was quite young, exuberant though her growth had been; and the man, whilst he reproached her for her discontent, looked at her as if she were the thing he loved best under the sun. He himself was very unlike her; he had a homely, gentle, thoughtful countenance, and rough-hewn features, and gray patient eyes; on the whole there was a great resemblance between him and a shaggy sheep-dog that stood on the threshold, a sheep-dog who became my

first friend, and who was the creature he had referred to by the name of Trust.

'Take care o' him, Trust,' said the man, as he left me and went through the door with his hoe and his spade, out to his garden work, in the still evening time; and Trust came slowly to my side, and touched me good humouredly with his great red tongue, and stretched himself down beside my box. Trust had a shrewd, kindly, black and white face, and I was glad to be in his charge instead of that of the girl who had spoken of selling me.

She indeed never looked at me any more, but betook herself to the window, where, by the sunset light, she began twisting an old hat about, and bedizening it with some shabby rose ribbons that seemed to please her but little, to judge by the dissatisfied passionate way in which she pulled them one from another, and stuck them here, and twisted them there, and finally flung them all aside in a tumbled heap.

When the twilight came—the soft, sudden, gray twilight of a mild November's day—she still sat by the lattice, with her elbows on the little deal table, and her hands twisted among her hair, staring vacantly out at the shadowy wood beyond, and doing nothing at all.

The man came in again, bringing in with him from his garden a sweet fresh scent of virgin mould, and of damp moss, and of leaves and grasses fragrant from late autumn buds that blossomed amongst them.

The girl never stirred.

'Eh, Avice,' he called cheerily to her. 'Ha ye no' a bit of supper for un, my lass? I'm rare and hungered; them clods is hard to turn, the land's so drenched-like wi' the wet.'

He gave himself a shake just as sheep-dogs do, and seemed to shake off him, as it were, fresh odours of flower-roots and dewy earth. Avice rose without alacrity, and took down a black pot from where it swung by a hook and chain in the wide brick chimney, and emptied its contents into a pan; then set the pan with some flet milk and oat cake, on the bench that served them as a table.

'They've took the smoke,' he murmured, as he ate the burnt and blackened potatoes; but he said it patiently, and made his meal without further lament; apparently used to the state of his kitchen. Avice ate her own supper without

tendering him any excuse for the mischance that had come to the potatoes whilst she had been sorting her rose ribbons; and indeed she had a little sweet cake for her own eating, of which she did not offer him, nor even myself an atom.

'All praises be to God as gi'es us our daily bread,' said the man with sincere and grateful reverence, as he bent his fair curly head over the remnants of the smoked potatoes.

'Daily bread!' muttered the handsome girl. 'It's main and fine what He do gi'e us, niver a bit o' wheat-loaf, mayhap, for weeks and weeks togither.'

But she muttered it under her breath, as she did not dare let him hear it. I heard it; but then dogs hear and see a great many things to which men, in their arrogance and their stupidity, are deaf and blind. Wherever yet was the man who could tell a thief by pure instinct? We smell dishonesty on the air, but you only ask it to dinner, play cards with it, appoint it executor in your will, trust in it as your attorney, your priest, and your brother, and set it in high places exultingly.

Even your clever men are such fools: your best worldly knowledge is only on the tip of your tongue as parrots carry their jargon, and your Rochefoucaulds writing their aphorisms make asses of themselves over their Longuevilles.

But I am straying afield again.

I remind myself of what old Trust, when I came to know him well, told me: 'Sheep and men are very much alike,' said Trust, who thought both very poor creatures. 'Very much alike indeed. They go in flocks, and can't give a reason why. They leave their fleece on any bramble that is strong enough to insist on fleecing them. They bleat loud at imagined evils, while they tumble straight into real dangers. And for going off the line, there's nothing like them. There may be pits, thorns, quagmires, spring-guns, what not, the other side of the hedge, but go off the straight track they will—and no dog can stop them. It's just the sheer love of straying. You may bark at them right and left; go they will, though they break their legs down a limekiln. O, men and sheep are wonderfully similar; take them all in all.'

This was a favourite saying of Trust's, and I think he knew, for he had been sheep-dog to several farms, and had seen a deal of mankind in the little towns on the market-

days, where the drovers haggled over their flocks, and fought over their ale. Trust was now far on in years, and his present master kept him only out of good-nature; but he was a valuable dog still, so far as shrewdness and faithfulness went.

When the man and the girl had gone up the little creaking dark stairway that evening, seeking their beds like the fowls with nightfall, Trust told me a little about them.

He had the garrulousness of old age. From a sense of chivalry and royalty he was cautious about what he said about Avice; but I saw that he did not think very well of her.

'She's a feckless thing,' he averred. 'Always running her head on ribbons, and rings, and gay rags, and such-like, all out of her station. She's a bit selfish too—all young things are; you are, I don't doubt. Only you can't get out of that bed yet, to fight for yourself as it were. She is rare and handsome; she thinks too much of it; she'll sit for hours staring at her face in that little bit of broken mirror, and she is full of discontent; but it will pass by and by, perhaps, all that. She is so young and so spoiled; she was the youngest of ten, and Ben the oldest. All the others are dead, and the father and mother as well, and these two are left all alone. Ben don't think there's her equal on all the earth; every little thing as he can scrape together he saves for her. Why, I know, she doesn't, that he's saved a matter of five silver pieces this year, and put it in a hole under the old apple-tree; and he is trying hard to save a whole pound by Barnaby Bright (midsummer-day, that's her birthday), that he may buy her a gown she set her heart on, when she saw it in the shop-window in Ashbourne this Candlemas. A great pink-coloured thing, very ugly I thought, but she cried for it like a child, and it vexed him sorely because he could nohow get it for her; he had only a few coppers by him. It is a very difficult thing to lay money by in these times, you see; quarry work brings ill pay, and the garden don't do well because it is rocky and damp; and the fowls haven't laid all the winter, and it's trouble enough to put by ten shillings a quarter for rent.'

And Trust shook his head like a dog on whom the economies of the world weighed heavily.

'Does she earn nothing?' I asked; I was acute for my age, even thus early.

'Lord bless you, no,' said Trust. 'Flinging a bit to the poultry, or mixing a little meal and water for cakes, is all that lass ever does from morn till night. There is a deal for a woman to do, let alone earning money; a woman that trims her place tidily, and looks after the live stock, and is handy at needle and thread, can save a power of money. She don't need to go and earn it. But Avice, she just lets him labour for her, in season and out of season, and does nothing herself, and then turns round and mutters at him because she can't eat off silver, and be shod in satin, and carry a train after her like the peacocks. There are lots of women like her; lots, my dear. You will be sure to come across them.'

Now Trust had, of a surety, never in his life known any other women than drovers' daughters and shepherds' wives; but when I grew older, and went into the world, I could not help thinking that those drovers' daughters and shepherds' wives must have represented the female sex very completely and very faithfully.

'Ben is good, is he not?' I asked, a little piteously; for there is nothing that seems so dreary to the young as doubting or condemning those to whom they belong.

'Good as gold,' said Trust emphatically. 'And far better indeed; for gold has done a swarm of harm in this world; and Ben has done nothing but good all the days of his life. He is the kind of a man that does good—to everybody except himself. I have known him ever since he was a lad of fourteen. His father was dead and his mother ailing; and Ben was about the farm where I lived, and he had the old woman and the babies all to keep as best he could. My old master helped him a bit, but it was Ben alone that kept the mother and the children off the parish. He was always a quiet, cheery, still sort of lad, but with a wonderful force of work in him, and as strong as a young bull. He has always had queer tender kind of thoughts too, about beasts and birds, and flowers and weeds, and all manner of things that he sees. There is much more in Ben than anybody thinks. When he's been sitting on the hillside with me, all alone with the sheep, I've seen an odd, bright wondering look came in his eyes, just as if the

bracken and the thyme had got talking to him, and he was hearing beautiful stories from them. He can't write a word, you know, and can only read just a little, spelling it out as sheep hobble over a rutty road; but I can't help thinking that Ben, if he only could express what he feels, and say all that the water and trees and things tell him, would be what I once heard some artistmen when they were at work painting on my moorside talk about for an hour and more—I think they called it a poet. At least one of them read aloud, and it was out of a book that they said was a poet's, whilst the others were sketching; and the sound of what they did read was very like the look in Ben's eyes when he was alone on the hills, gazing at the clouds and the mists.'

I listened, much impressed, but not at all understanding him.

'You must have thought a great deal yourself?' I said timidly. He looked very thoughtful with his old wrinkled and shaggy brows.

'Of course,' said Trust calmly. 'Dogs think a great deal; when people believe us asleep, nine times out of ten we are meditating. But men won't credit that, you see, because if ever they happen to hit on a thought themselves, they rush and set it all down in black and white, and cry out to all the others what wonders they are. You must think, among the hills and the dales; they make you, whether you like it or not. Even the sheep think, I do believe, though they look so stupid. Everything in creation thinks, that's my idea. Look at a little beetle, how clever it is, how cunning in defence, how patient in labour, how full of disquiet;—but you cannot understand, you are only a nurseling. Go to sleep until day-light. Myself I never do more than doze; that comes of habit when I used to have my sheepfolds to guard. Here there is nothing to take care of, for there is nothing to steal, unless it be those brass earrings of Avice's!'

With which smothered satire he stretched himself to enjoy that semi-slumber which the French call '*entre chat et loup;*' and I curled myself in my box to pass my first night under the roof of Reuben Dare.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE ROSE-THORN.

It was scarce daybreak when Trust went up the steep ladder-like stairs, and scratched loudly at the door on top of them.

'I always wake them so,' he explained when he descended: and I saw afterwards that he never was too soon or two late a single minute, though there was no village clock within hearing, no clock at all in the house, and the sun at that time was as irregular and as little to be depended on as the sun usually is in the British Isles. 'Only a dog!'—ah, 'only a dog,' with no watch in his pocket, will keep time with a punctuality that men seldom attain, despite all their best chronometric aids!

Soon a slow heavy step sounded on the stairway, and Reuben himself came down into the gloom; patted Trust, spoke to me and undid the single shutter. There was not very much light even then: it was a chilly morning. He went out to a little shed, brought in an armful of peat and brushwood, made his own fire with a great deal of labour, and got out his own breakfast. It was only a draught of cider and a hunch of rye bread; the diet on which most of your hard rural labour, your sowing and reaping, your ploughing and hoeing, your hedging and ditching, is done after all.

To Trust he gave more of the bread than he ate himself; and for me he heated a bowl of flet milk, talking to us both in his kindly and dreamy fashion.

Later he took down from the cupboard a single little dainty white china cup, and a small black china teapot; and a very tiny white wheat loaf, and pat of sweet amber-hued butter. He put some tea in the pot—weighing it as heedfully as some men weigh gold, for it was terribly costly to him—and left them all ready together, on the table under the lattice.

Then he waited a moment or two, listening for a step on the stair: there was none—it was all silent above. A shade of disappointment stole over his face, but no anger; he took his huge pickaxe and other tools from their corner, put them over his shoulder, and went out through the door, lingering a moment with a backward look up the stair

Then he drew the door after him, and I heard his steps growing fainter and fainter as they trod down the moss. Trust had gone with him.

I was alone a long time, a very long time; so long that I whimpered and cried, unheard, till I was tired, and held my peace for want of breath. When the sun was quite high, the girl Avice at length appeared.

'Be quiet, will 'ee, little wretch!' she cried to me; and went straightway to the table. Her eyes glistened a little as she saw the butter and tea, and she sat down and ate; never casting the smallest morsel to me.

Beautiful she was by the morning light; with her fair, rich colour, and her gleaming eyes, and her crown of half-bright, half-dusky hair, like the bronze in which there is much mixture of gold. But I thought I never saw anything of so much greed, or so intensely selfish. There was a vivid animal pleasure in the sight of what were dainties to her senses; but there was no sort of gratitude or feeling at the generous and thoughtful affection which had been thus tender of her in her absence. She ate all there was on the table, seeming to like to draw the pleasure out to its longest span; when ended, she washed the things and set them away, and did a little housework, all in a very idle slovenly manner, like one whose heart was not at all in her occupation.

Then she went and fed the poultry, calling them round the door-sill. I could see them fight, and peck, and beat each other over the disputed grain; and when one helpless little speckled hen, who had scarcely a feather left in her body owing to her merciless sisters' unremitting onslaughts, was finally driven away from the mash-pan without having tasted so much as a barleycorn. I heard Avice laugh,—the first good-humoured and amused laugh that I had heard from her lips.

To feed the martyred hen she made no attempt; she left it to mope upon a rail.

When she came within, she drew her spinning-wheel to her, and began that ancient, graceful, classic work, old as the days of Troy. But she only tangled her yarn, and spoiled her web, and at last she pushed the distaff impatiently from her, and took up her piece of mirror, and fell to twining her string of red beads in and out of her

hair, and knotting them round her arms, and wreathing them on her breast above her low-cut leathern bodice.

This little cottage of Reuben Dare's was quite alone, in the heart of the Peak country, on the edge of a great wood, chiefly of pines, at the farther extremity of which was the stone quarry where he worked, fair weather and foul; whilst in his leisure time he reared a few hardy flowers and simple fruits in his damp mossy garden, to which nothing but the indigenous ferns, and burdocks, and coltsfoot, took really kindly.

At the back of the cottage rose a hill, all grown over with ash, and larch, and firs; whilst, beyond that, there stretched the great dreary steppes of moorland, with a Roman tumulus, or a Druidic rocking-stone, alone breaking here and there the monotony of their brown, level, sheep-cropped wastes. Ashbourne was seven miles away, and the nearest hamlet was three; a scattered farm or two stood on the moors, and the Hall on the other side of the wood, where my forefathers had been reared, was utterly deserted by its owners, and left to the care of three or four superannuated servants, under whose neglect my delicate, high-born mother had perished.

Reuben's cottage was pretty; a square stone place with a pyramidal red roof, the whole enveloped in ivy and lichens, and the shade of spreading yew boughs; the same yews from which, in Robin Hood's days, the famous bowmen of England had been served with their weapons. Although it was midwinter, the cottage had a rosy glory that depended on no season, for it was covered, from the lowest of its stones to the top of its peaked roof, with a gigantic rose-thorn.

'Sure the noblest shrub as ever God have made,' would Ben say, looking at its massive, cactus-like branches, with their red, waxed, tender-coloured berries. The cottage was very old, and the rose-thorn was the growth of centuries. Men's hands had never touched it. It had stretched where it would, ungoverned, unhampered, unarrested. It had a beautiful dusky glow about it always, from its peculiar thickness and its blended hues; and in the chilly weather the little robin red-breasts would come and flutter into it, and screen themselves in its shelter from the cold, and make it rosier yet with the brightness of their little ruddy throats.

'Tha Christ-birds do allus seem safest like i' tha Christ-bush,' Ben would say softly, breaking off the larger half of his portion of oaten cake, to crumble for the robins with the dawn. I never knew what he meant, though I saw he had some soft, grave, old-world story in his thoughts, that made the rose-thorn and the red-breasts both sacred to him.

Avice would only laugh; and if he went away to work before the little birds had eaten all his gifts, would drive her chickens under the great thorn-tree to steal their oat-crumbs from those shy, pretty, russet songsters.

Midwinter too had other beauties in that secluded place. At least I heard old Trust say so many times; and it was true.

There were such grand tempestuous sunsets, with one-half the sky like a sheet of steel above the brown round hills, and the other half all dusky, red, and gold, behind the driving purple clouds. There were such beautiful wondrous snowstorms, that falling down past the great ivy-covered trunks and the dense net-work of auburn-hued branches, and drifting by the dim, soft, solemn shapes of the hill-sides and the bleak shadows of the fir-woods, mingled so strange a phantasy of dying colour, and made the earth seem dim, and sweet, and distant, even as in a dream.

Then one could see so easily the coming and the going, the joys and the terrors, the loves and the strifes of the rooks, high above in the tallest trees that stood on the highest crest of the rocks. One could see the foxes' earths under the leafless brushwood, and the rabbits' holes under the withered bracken. The little ouzels, when they found their shallow ponds and freshets frozen, grew very tame, and fluttered close to the garden wall in hope of catching a stray crumb from the hens or a stray bone from the cat.

The cat herself—an unamiable creature when the weather was warm—grew sociable and good-natured when the snow drove her in-doors; and she shared with Trust and myself a place on the hearth-stone, before the cheery, brightly-burning fire of 'cobbles,' that flamed up under the round swinging kettle into the wide black shaft of the old-fashioned chimney. For if she spit or scratched Trust drove her away from the fire; and she soon learned—what indeed is the rule for us all, from cats to court-beauties,

from dogs to diplomatists—that the way to get the warmth of the world (and to give a sly safe pat to your neighbour) is to sheathe all your claws under velvet, and to keep in an excellent temper.

All living things seemed to draw closer together in the perils and privations of the winter, as you men do in the frost of your frights or your sorrows. In summer—as in prosperity—every one is for himself, and is heedless of others because he needs nothing of them.

The cottage was very pretty at all seasons, as I say, with its two long quaint windows and its wide door, through which the sunshine seemed for ever streaming, and a little brook singing close by, right under the garden grasses. It was very pretty, standing down as it did at the foot of the hill, with the dense green of wood all before it. But it was very lonely, and no sound ever came to it save the sound of the water-freshets, and of the birds in the branches, except when now and then thunder of some louder blast than common rolled faintly from the distant quarry, followed by the rumbling echo of the loosened falling stones.

It was lonely, certainly; and dull to those for whom the brown silent moors had no grandeur, the ceaseless song of the brook no music, the old gray hoary stones no story, the innumerable woodland creatures for ever astir under brake and brushwood, no wonder and no interest.

And the girl Avice was one of these. The poetic faculty —as you call the insight and the sympathy which feels a divinity in all created things and a joy unutterable in the natural beauty of the earth—is lacking in the generality of women, notwithstanding their claims to the monopoly of emotion. If it be not, how comes it that women have given you no great poet since the days of Sappho?

It is women's deficiency in intellect, you will observe. Not a whit: it is women's deficiency in sympathy.

The greatness of a poet lies in the universality of his sympathies. And women are not sympathetic, because they are intensely self-centred.

As Avice sat one day, when winter had grown into earliest spring, pulling her beads about, and gazing at herself in her bit of glass as usual, there came in sight in the distance, under the arching boughs of the pines, a little old man with

a pack on his back. I found afterwards that he was a pedlar called Dick 'o the Wynnats (i.e., of the gates of the wind,) who journied about on foot within a radius of twenty miles or so round Ashbourne, and who came through this wood to the Moor farms about once in three months—one of the very few new-comers that ever disturbed the solitudes round Reuben's cottage.

Avice's eyes sparkled with eager delight as she saw him approach, and she darted through the open door and down the glade to meet him with more welcoming alacrity than I ever saw her display, to any living creature.

I knew nothing about lovers in those days, or I might have thought he had been one of hers, so gleefully did she greet him. But if I had done so I should have been undeceived on his entrance, for an uglier little old fellow never breathed, and he was over seventy in age, though tough and hard as a bit of ash-stick.

'What ha' gotten tha morn, Dick?' asked Avice eagerly, longing for a sight of his pack.

'Eh! ha' gotten a power o' things,' said Dick, leisurely unstrapping it, and letting it down on the brick floor; but m'appen y'ull gie me a drop of summat to wet my throstle wi' first, Avice; canna, my wench?'

Avice somewhat impatiently, brought him a little jugful of cider.

'Ben, he wunna ha' ought else to drink i' the house than that pig's swill,' she said, with a sovereign contempt for what she offered.

'And hanna a mossel o' vittles wi' it?' asked old Dick with insidious softness. 'I darena tak' this stuff a'out eaten of a mossel; it 'ud turn 'e my stomach, it would.'

I wished it might turn in his stomach, for I had conceived a great dislike to him, and had a horrid idea that he might take me away in his pack.

Avice, however, supplied him with the desired 'mossel,' and he appeared to have disowned all idea of danger in the cider, for he drained the jug to its last drop. Meanwhile Avice, fallen on her knees, was swiftly undoing the leathern straps of his portable warehouse, and feasting her eyes on all its wondrous treasures.

They consisted of glass beads, small mirrors, rolls of ribbons, gaudy cotton handkerchiefs, many coloured woollen

fabrics, penny illustrated periodicals, and all things of the cheapest and of the finest that could allure the eyes of country maidens, and the silver coins of their saving-boxes. But they were a million-fold more attractive to Avice Dare than the dainty robin's nest in the ivied wall, or the delicate bells of the dew on the leaves, or the marvellous sunset-colours in the western skies, or the exquisite heath on the broad brown fells, or any one of the many beauteous things in her daily life to which her sight was blind.

She lingered in rapture over every one of the tawdry worthless pieces of apparelling, and laid each aside with a sigh of envious longing.

The pedlar let his goods work their own charm whilst he enjoyed his 'mossel;' then he sang their praises, and spread them out freshly before her.

'Look'ee, lass,' said he; 'here be a many things made right on to please ye. There bean't such a lot as this'n anywhere else our side o' tha Peak. Bless ye, afore I've been half across moor-side I'll ha' emptied my pack o' 'em all, down to the littlest spool o' cotton. But I'd rayther sell 'em to you; 'cause there bean't such a well-looking lass as ye anywheres i' tha country. Ye set tha clo'es off, that'ee do. Now, what'll 'ee fit on tha morn, Avice?'

Avice shook her pretty curly head.

'I ha'n't gotten no siller,' she said with sullen sadness. 'Tha ten pennies I got for tha eggs ye had last time ye come; I ha'n't got no more, not a brass farden, an 'twas iver so. Tha things is lovely; but ye wunna let me hev 'em on tick, as 'twere?'

To this hint old Dick gave a sturdy denial.

'Canna my dearie; canna, as 'twas iver so. I gies allays ready money myself—allays; and if I was kep' out o' it I should ha' to go to workhus. I'd do a deal for ye—ye're so pretty wi' yer gowd hair—but I darena do that, let alone how wild Ben 'ud be wi' me: ye's aware o' that.'

'Ben's a gaby!' said Avice savagely, spreading out before her longing eyes a shawl of bright scarlet and orange, and then folding it around her lovingly. 'Lots o' folk go on tick, and why na we? We'd be sure to pay sometime—when tha garden was forrard, or the hins got well a-laying. What's that there blue ribbon? That's beautiful!'

'An 'ud look beautiful in yer hair, my pretty,' said the subtle Dick, holding it up against the light. 'And then there's this red handkercher as 'ud go lovely over it—there bean't a nicer 'sortment than blue and red togither. That's a rare bargain too, that there lot o' jew'lry. I get it straight from a born lady, as had come down 'i the world, and was obleeged to part wi' it. Them's real jew'ls, they is, and all dirt cheap—only five shillin' for the lot. Real dimonds; fit for the Queen o' England. Why, if ye hev them on at the wakes 'i this summer-time the wunna be a lass as 'ull hold a candle to ye, and a' the lads 'ull be dazed-like wi' yer glory. Pit 'em on, my wench, pit 'em on, even if ye canna take 'em; I long to sees 'em upo' ye.'

All this, uttered in a soft sleepy 'tongue 'o the Peak,' that slurs over every harsh word, and rolls its phrases all one in another, took its due effect upon Avice. Intensely ignorant, and honestly believing in her simplicity that she saw real 'dimonds' before her, she yielded to the temptation, and clasped the brazen bands, sparkling with their bits of white glass, on her arms and about her throat, gazing at them and herself entranced.

Old Dick clapped his bony hands in admiring ecstasy.

'Lord's sake!' he cried, 'ony look at yerself! Why lord-a-mercy, no queen could ekall ye!'

The old hypocrite was most likely half-sincere. Avice was a very pretty picture then. Her arms were too fair by nature to have ever become sun-browned, and they were shaped to satisfy a sculptor; her throat was long and slender, though it denoted physical strength; and her neck, white as the driven snow, was the full blue-veined bosom of a goddess. Nor were these beauties much concealed by the low-cut leathern bodice that enclosed them: and as she breathed, quickly and feverishly, with longing and self-love, her eyes gleamed, her face flushed, and the mock diamonds really lent to her a curious kind of glittering transitory lustre.

'O, if ony I had 'em!' she cried, tossing her arms above her head, and unconsciously giving more beauty to her disclosed charms. 'O, if ony I had 'em! They'd look at nobody else at the wakes!'

The wakes are the rural feasts held over the Peak country,

at every town and village on the anniversary of the building of its parish church. This religious commemoration takes the form of feasting, junketing, drinking, dancing, and eating very thin, round sweet cakes; and it was the only form of public festivity that Avice had ever in her brief life enjoyed.

To her the wakes seemed the pivot of the world, and all the seasons rolled only to bring the wakes round again to rejoice the souls of their worshippers.

'Ye must ha' 'em, my dearie,' murmured old Dick beguilingly. 'Ye must, somehow or ither. I should na ha' the heart to see ony body else a-sportin' of 'em now I've once seed 'em on yer bonny brist. Just 'ee think a bit—ha' na ye got the littlest hantle o' siller?'

Avice glanced towards me; and I trembled in my box.

'There's tha pup as Ben ha' gi'en he tin week agone,' she said. 'They tell us as how 'tis a deal o' walue. Would 'ee tak' it, and sell it i' the town?'

'Lawk a mussy no!' cried Dick in horror. 'I canna abide dogs: niver could. There's that Trust o' yourn, allays a sniffin' and mouthin' at me, if he be by when I come. Think o' some ither way, my lass. Look 'ee—ye ha' got dimonds as a princess hersel' 'ud be proud to weer. Ye'll niver part wi' 'em now ye ha' once pit 'em on, Avice?'

Mephistopheles, of whom I have subsequently heard much and often, was at his old work with women in the person of the pedlar of the Peak. Only here Mephistopheles thought the jewels enough without adding the temptation of passion, and substituted Self-Love for Love; the first is the more potent seducer of the two with the fair sex, which enrols a hundred Avices to one Gretchen.

Dick o' tha Wynnats knew well that, having once put the things on, the girl would never let them go out of her sight again unpurchased.

Avice stood with them clasped about her neck and arms, ruffling her hair in her perplexity, and with the great tears beginning to brim over in her eyes, because she saw no means whereby she could make herself mistress of these splendid gems.

Suddenly she grew very pale; the blood forsook her cheeks and lips; a sudden thought—hope and fear both in

one—seemed to leap into her eyes, and burn the tears in them dry.

'Is it a matter o' five shillin'?' she asked; and her voice was hoarse and lower than usual as she spoke.

Five shillings were in Reuben's cottage as five thousand sovereigns are in the great world.

'Five shillin',' averred the pedlar, 'and I would na sell 'em for that to ony else than ye, my dearie—real dimonds as they be, and wored by a great lady.'

'Wait a bit,' murmured Avice. 'Now I think on it, m'appen I can do it. Just 'bide a bit, will 'ee?'

And still with her face very pale, and a steadfast, reckless, yet scared look upon it, she went out of the door, the sunlight catching the 'dimonds,' and playing on them till the poor glass trumpery flashed and glowed, as though it really were some gem of Asia.

Where she went I did not see; she had closed the door behind her. Old Dick tarried patiently, putting the contents of his pack in order again, and did not even look through the lattice.

Dick, I suppose, was a worldly-wise man; and thought that so long as the money was forthcoming for his merchandise, he had nothing to do with whence it came. Pretty girls might not care that he should know.

Presently Avice returned: her face was very flushed now, and she spoke with eager, tremulous excitement.

'I ha' gotten it, Dick,' she cried. 'Here it be. It's a swarm of siller, sure, to pay all at onst—but the jew'ls are worth it. Here,—one, two, three, four, five. All good money. All good!'

The peculiar haste and excitement of her manner struck the shrewd old man, for he rung and bit every coin in succession with care, as though suspecting bad money amongst them from the very volubility of her asseverations. They were all good, however; and he put them by in a leather pouch, chuckling contentedly as he did so.

'I knew 'ee got the money somewhere,' he cried. 'But ye wimmen allays want so much pressin' and coaxin' to make 'ee do what ye're dyin' to do! Sure, and ye have the bravest dimonds i' the country-side, Avice. Nell at the Dell Farm will be main and mad when I tells her. She's allays rare and jealous o' ye, wench. M'appen ye've got a coin or two more lay by, that ye could gie us for this lot of blue ribbi- ?'

'No, I ha'n't got a penny!' said Avice fiercely, covering her eyes with her hands to shut out the sight of the coveted ribbon. Already her diamonds scarcely contented her.

'Well, well, don't 'ee fret. Ye got enow on ye neck to make 'em all crazed-like wi' jealousy,' said the benevolent Dick in consolation. 'And look 'ee, I'll put in this lot of pictur' papers, all for good will; they'll wile ye a bit when ye're dull. They're all about lords and ladies; uncommon pretty readin', and a power o' murders in 'em too. Them quality seems allus a-cuttin' each other's throats, if one may b'lieve them there pennies.'

With which he deposited two or three of the penny numbers of fiction on the little table, and regarded himself, it was evident, as a person of princely liberality.

'I hate readin',' said Avice ungraciously, looking, nevertheless, at the illustrations. 'I dew spell these here out sometimes, 'cause I like to see how folk live in great houses. How fine it must be to hev gentry a-killin' theirselves for ye, and a-wearin' o' masks to trap ye, and a-carryin' ye off to palaces i' the dead o' tha night. Do 'ee say as all's true what they tells?'

'All's gospel truth i' tha pennies,' said Dick promptly, forgetting his previous scepticism. 'It's all dukes what writes in them, and they must know what they does theirselves.'

'And does they wear masks, and swords, and drive in gowden chariots, and carry off live princesses?' asked Avice eagerly, the dulness of her imagination stirred.

Dick scratched his head thoughtfully.

'Well,—I seed a duke in these parts onst, long ago,' he said meditatively, 'and he was a little old rum-lookin' chap, I thought, wi' grey hair and yaller gaiters. And he rid a fat black cob, and he said thank 'ee when I oped the gate for un. And I could na see as he was anything diff'rent to Tim Radly the stockin'-higgler, as was amazing like him. But them pennies is gospel-true, lass; niver ye go to doubt it. And now I'll bid 'ee good day, my wench; for I must get over moor-side afore the strike o' twelve.'

And throwing his pack over his shoulder, and taking his staff, the old man left us, and went out by the rear of the house, and began to climb the steep wooded hill that rose between the cottage and the moorlands that lay beyond.

Avice scarcely noticed his departure. She was absorbed in thinking of the dukes and in gazing at her jewels, with her elbow resting on the table and her eyes fixed on the glass. Suddenly, however, she darted out and called to the pedlar, as he slowly crept up the lower slope of the hill. I could hear his voice reply from above.

'What is 't, lass? Ha' ye found siller enow for the blue ribbin?'

'No!' she cried to him. 'Ony—ony—I forgot to tell 'ee—if ye see Ben any time don't 'ee say nothin' to him o' tha dimonds. Mind that!'

'O' course not,' he sung out in answer. 'Wheniver does I say anythin'?'

'Thank 'ee,' she called back. 'Ye knaw he dusna like my layin' out o' money on rattletraps and bits o' brass, as he calls 'em.'

'Ben's a fule,' retorted the old man from above, amongst the firs.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER THE APPLE TREE.

She came into the house again and ran to her mirror at once: she was feverish and little at ease, it seemed, but her 'dimonds' still afforded her rapturous delight. The gold was so yellow, and the stones were so big!

She seemed never to tire of clasping them on and off, and changing their resting-place, and picturing to herself, doubtless, the admiration she would draw on her at the wakes, and the bitterness of soul which she would cause to Nell o' the Moor Farm. Hour after hour she spent, gazing at these things and at herself in them, and thinking, idly and purposelessly, yet with a curious mixture of anxiety and savagery, to judge by the shadows that flitted one after another across her face—the shadows of desire and of dissatisfaction.

'If I could ony be where them things be wored all day, and dukes be a-swearin' o' love till they kills theirselves!' she muttered half aloud, over her precious gems.

She had led the simplest and most innocent life possible; she had been no more touched by whispers of evil than the little blue cuckoo's-eye flowering without; she had been brought up with the birds and the beasts, the noble moors and the radiant waters, and had had no more to acquaint her with the guilt of the world than the young lambs at play in the dales. But yet these longings were in her; these senses were inborn and importunate.

Vision she had not, imagination she had not, ambition she knew naught of, and intelligence was dead in her; but these she had—vanity, and greed, and sensuality, the true tempters of thousands of women.

After a while she took her treasures up the stairs, to hide them away, no doubt, in some box in her bedchamber, and there she remained till the day had almost waned, when she came down again and put on the potatoes to boil. She threw them into the pot with their skins scarcely washed, and sat down to peruse one of the 'pennies,' reading it slowly and painfully, spelling each word out, and tracing it with her forefinger.

She started a little as Trust entered with the setting of the sun, and after him his master. Ungracious at all times to her brother, her manner changed this evening; she welcomed him with more cordial warmth than usual, chattered with a flow of words very rare with her, and busied herself in getting his supper with much more willingness than she had shown on any night previous.

Ben himself looked very pleased with the alteration in her, and responded to it with a caressing tenderness that was infinitely gentle and touching.

'I'd a run o' luck to-day, my pretty,' he said, sitting over his potatoes and oatmeal. 'There was a lady as had lost her track i' the big pine wood, and I pit her right, and she gi'ed me a shillin' for 't. And soon arter, whiles I was a-working', there kem a man—a-trampin', you know, as those paintin' chaps and tha fellows as break up the stones wi' a little hammer allays do. They *ses* they's gennlemen, but I niver b'lieve as gennlemen born 'ud go about wi' nasty oil-pots or bags o' bits o' gritstone. Howe'er, that's neither here nor there. This un, he spoke uncommon kind, and I picked him out a atom of cawke and a mossel or two of Blue-John, as seemed to please him, and he gi'ed me a

shillin' tew. So I was rare i' luck tha morn. And Trust, tew; for he got a lot of san'widges out o' this here gennleman's pack. How's ta pup? He look rare an' brave. Eh, my little 'un, ye'll pull through safe enow, won't e'e? 'Tis a pretty crittur, sure.'

This was the first praise that I ever heard of my beauty, which has all my life been remarkable: it has been lauded by many lips, but by none more honest and kindly than poor Ben's.

Avice received his news with unwonted sympathy, and seemed to desire to atone for the general badness of her careless cookery, by an assiduity that should leave him nothing to desire in his present meal, and induce him to linger over it longer than usual. In this, however, she failed. He cared little what he ate, and he had a design he was eager to execute.

The supper, and the thanksgiving for it, ended, he rose and took his gardening tools.

'Ye wunna go and garden tha night, Ben?' asked Avice rapidly. 'Do 'ee look: tha sun's down.'

'There's a lot o' light, lass,' he laughed in answer. 'I allus garden arter 'tis down or afore 'tis riz. Ye knows that well enow.'

'But it's so cold, Ben, and so damp,' she urged, with a curious feverishness. 'Ye'll get the rewmatiz, sure as ye live, if ye garden this time o' night.'

He laughed aloud at this.

'Why, Avice, d'ee think I's an old un of sixty year? D'ee iver know me ailin' of aught? Stay'ee in if ye feel the damp; but the weather's no been bred yet as can daunt or damage o' me.'

And he went.

Trust whispered over my box:

'He is going to bury that two shillings with the rest under the apple-tree. She does not dream he has saved money there, you know.'

I said nothing.

'And it's all for her,' added Trust; 'all for that ugly red gown that she cried for last Candlemas.'

Avice stayed by the hearth, with her hands clasped and her head bent, and the ruddy light of the cobble fire playing on her bowed head.

A brief space later there came on the night air a great cry, followed by a sudden silence. Trust rushed headlong out; Avice remained unmovable.

A little later her brother appeared on the threshold. His face was very pale, and he looked dazed and appalled.

'Avice, there's bin a thief here!" he said tremulously, though his grave voice was very low.

'A thief!' she echoed, without lifting her head. 'What hev the fowls bin stole?'

'No; they's in their coops,' he answered, with a tremor still in his voice; 'but there's bin somebody a robbin' me, for all that;—a-robbin' you, my little lass, a robbin' you!'

'Me!'

'Ah, my dearie, ye didna know,' said Ben softly and sadly. 'I was wrong, maybe, not to tell 'ee; ye'd ha' been more heedful o' tramps about. But ye see, lassie, ye was so wishful for that gownd, that I thoct as how I'd surprise ye. And, d'ye see, I says to myself, says I, I'll pit every stiver I can git in a hole under tha old apple-tree, and store it up till Barnaby Bright, and thin tak her o'er to Ashbourne and gie her the thing she's a-longin' for. That was wot I thoct, ye see, and now it's every shillin' gone. The moss hev been pulled up, and the hole's clean empty as empty can be. If I'd only telled ye, my pretty! And now ye'll have to wait for yer gownd.'

Avice stood, still unmoved, waving to and fro in the fire; then at length she spoke very huskily.

'Lord, how good o' ye, Ben! Who can it be as ha' took it?'

He ruffled his fair hair in sorrowful perplexity.

'Some tramps, a coorse, my dear. Didna ye hear any steps about?'

'Niver a one. But 'tis true I went up moor-side—just to look as whether the gorse's in bloom. It might ha' bin done whiles I was there.'

'I dessay, I dessay! But who could tell as I'd money there?'

'They might ha' seed ye o'er tha fence.'

'Dick o' tha Wynuats ha'n't bin by, hev he? I'm allus mistrustful o' th' old man.'

'I ain't seed Dick come Wednesday was a month. It must ha' bin a tramp.'

'Tramps don't kim much o' these parts,' said Ben with a sigh. 'It must sure hev been one, though. They might look ower the fence, as ye say. I'm only sorry for ye, my lassie: it 'ud bin such a joy t' ye to ha' had that gownd.'

Avice went up to him, and threw her white arms round his neck and kissed him.

'Niver mind, Ben; I'll think as how ye hev gi'en it to me; that 'ull do jist as well.'

He returned his caresses fondly, stroking her hair with a tender pitying touch.

'Theer's a brave wench! 'Tis rare and good o' ye to bear 't so well, Avice. It dew cut a bit, 'cause ye see I was so set up like wi' content, a bringin' them tow shillin' home just now; and they'd ha' made sivin, and ther'd a bin but twice that agin to git afore ta simmer-time for ye to ha' the gownd. And now 't 's all to begin o'er agin; and I canna surprise ye thin, 'cause I've telled ye o' it now—'

His voice fell suddenly. It was a blow to him to have been robbed of this innocent kindly pleasure; and five shillings are not made every day of a quarryman's life.

Avice kissed him yet again.

'Niver ye mind,' she murmured, with a certain emotion trembling even in her hard changeless voice; 'm'appen the hins will tak to layin' sune—'tis springtide; and if they dew, we'll pit the money by to make this'n.'

'That's a good lass,' he said tenderly. 'But it wunna be the same to me. The hins' money is allus your'n, my dear; but wot I thoct on was to gie ye somethin' that ye suld never dream was a-comin'. Howe'er, I'll try and make tha pund up wi'out takin' from yer poultry-purse. Come out and look at tha apple-tree; ye'll see as how it must have been thieved this day, for theer's all the moss pulled-up like, and the marks is as clear as spad could mak' 'em. No dew's fell since 'twas done. Well, we'll leave them as did it wi' God. Sure they wunna be th' happier for 't.'

Ben lived between wood and moor, far from the cities of men; and he still held the golden belief that stolen bread must be bitter in the unrighteous mouth.

'Come and look, my dearie,' he urged again; and Avice went.

CHAPTER IV.

TRUST'S TALE.

THAT night, when all was still, I told what I had heard to Trust.

He growled so long and so loud that he awoke Reuben, who threw open the lattice and called out aloud on the night-silence that he had a fowling-piece ready loaded for thieves.

'There's no thief save the one as he wears in his heart,' muttered Trust. 'Ah, it's in times like this that dogs wish they had human tongues.'

'Why have we not?' I asked him. I was a young wee thing, and I did not know.

'Have you not heard?' said Trust. 'To be sure, you are still in the cradle; but it's a thing you ought to hear, so listen, I will tell you a story.

'In the early youth of the world, in the time when men were not weary with the endless roll of the ages, as they are weary now, there reigned in the East a King. All people dwelt then in the East; the West that is now so great was only a vast dark wilderness, where the lands were all locked in ice, and there only lived the strange and nameless things that we find to-day entombed in the stones and the mines. The East had all the sunlight and all the glory and all the races of men. Do I speak too deep for your baby-age? I tell this thing as my fathers told it.

'Well, this king was victorious and young, and of beauty and stature exceeding. He had great content in his life, and his dominion was the fairest of any that lay under the orient suns. He had many ministers and friends and lovers; but the one of them all that he loved and trusted the best was his dog—the great Ilderim. In those days dogs were the comrades and the counsellors of men. Men knew then how much wiser than they were the dogs, and sought to take profit of their wisdom; and throughout the breadth of the land all dogs were held in high honour. They were guardians of gold, and took no bribes; they were warriors, and asked no star or spoil; they were public servants, and made no private purse; they were counsellors of kings, and trafficked in no nation's liberties. They were strangely unlike men in all things.

'Now Ilderim was the noblest of his race: black, lion-shaped, fleet as the deer, strong as the bear, keen as the eagle, faithful as—ah! what other thing is ever as faithful as a dog? And he was ever by the side of the king as trustiest counsellor and truest friend. The king loved Ilderim, and Ilderim loved the king. Their hours were all spent together. Together they chased the tiger and elephant; together they warred with the savage chiefs who ravaged the neighbouring countries; together they roamed in the balmy rose-gardens and slept under the pleasant palm-groves.

'The services that Ilderim had done to the monarch were as countless as the dates on the trees; and when the heralds shouted forth the great deeds of the great people of the nation, first of all they proclaimed the acts and the prowess of Ilderim. And seven times he had saved the life of the king: once from water, once from steel, once from a leopard, once from a poisoner, once from an earthquake, once from an armed foe at midnight. For all these things the king felt that no gifts the dog could ask would be too great to bestow; but Ilderim never asked aught. He wore a collar of gold, indeed, because the ornament pleasured the king; but he made no account of the bauble, and if ever he preferred a request for anything, it was never for himself, but only for some poor and starving mongrel whom he had met in the streets. All his own race worshipped Ilderim, and the smallest and meanest dog amongst them had only to tell his woes and his wrongs to the palace favourite to have them aided and redressed at once.

'So Ilderim lived with the king a score years and more, and saved him from evil many a time. Now at the end of that period the king took a new wife to his harem, and made her queen, and adored her accordingly. She was young and of exquisite beauty, and she made a slave and a fool of her lord. With her words she caressed Ilderim; but he knew well that she bore him no love; and once when she set food before him he smelt poison, and did not eat thereof. But he knew that the king loved her, and therefore he said naught of this wickedness; for Ilderim was wise, and knew well that a man freshly in love is more blind than the bats at noonday.

'In time it came to pass, and this also full soon, that

palace and people all saw that the queen was a wanton, and faithless. Her paramour was a slave at her court. And all the nation knew the king's dishonour, only he himself was still blind. The people murmured, and mocked him, and all the honour in which they held him ceased; and his very throne was in jeopardy because he was fooled by a traitorous wife. And still his eyes did not open; still he swore by the pure faith of his queen.

'None dared to tell him of his own disgrace; for all said, whoever tells it will die. Then Ilderim spake and said, "Though I die, yet will I tell him; for his shame will turn his people against him, and they will arise and slay him, not choosing to have a fool for their ruler." "He will kill even you," they urged to him; "hold your peace, and let the end come." Ilderim made answer, "Whoso holds his peace when it is for his friend's welfare that he speaks, is a coward. He shall no more be the tie of a wanton."

'Then he went straightway to the presence-chamber; and he spoke in the speech of men; and he told his lord of that frail wife's dishonour, and said, "Arise! cast her off, and be strong as thou ever hast been." But the king, mad with rage, would not hearken; he leapt down from his ivory throne, and drew his dagger out from his girdle, and thrust it into the heart of Ilderim. "So serve I the foes of my angel!" he cried; and Ilderim fell at his feet. "I forgive," he said simply, and died.

'Then when the king saw that indeed he had slaughtered the noblest friend that he had upon earth, he was as one distraught, and rent his robes, and bewailed bitterly all the day through, and called unceasingly on Ilderim's name. But Ilderim lay dead in the audience-chamber, and heard no more the voice of his grief.

'And that night the king himself was slain by his queen's paramour.

'So from that hour all Ilderim's race declared that never more would they utter the human speech of men, since he had perished thus, through man's blindness and woman's sin. The oath was sworn by generation after generation, and gradually the knowledge of this tongue that never passed their lips died out, and has never been learnt again. Wes till know the meaning of men when they speak, but we never speak their phrases in answer; since death by

the hand of a fool and an ingrate was the only recompense that fealty and truth brought to the great Ilderim, or have brought to his race to this day. For men are still what they were in the days of that king; and dogs still are the same, only now we are silent.'

CHAPTER V.

AMBROSE OF THE FORGE.

THE spring soon deepened into that lovely flush of the early year which is beyond all other seasons in sweetness and in hope. By the time they allowed me to leave my bed and patter about in the sunshine, and wet my little white feathered feet in the burn, it was quite mid-spring, and infinitely beautiful in those north-country woods.

A delicious living sunshine streamed all day through the wide doorway. The rose-thorn on the walls and roof was moved all day by the wings and the songs of the nesting birds that made their homes in it. Primroses bloomed in great tufts under every moss-grown trunk, and were followed later on by the wild blue hyacinths and the lilies of the valley. The tender green fronds of the ferns uncurled to new life, and the waters, freshly snow-fed, brimmed over in every rivulet's channel, and bubbled under ever knot of dock-leaves.

Now and then, when I have been nestled on a satin robe at an opera-supper, surfeited with macaroons, almond-wafers, and truffles, I have remembered that pleasant spring-time, when I was so well contented, playing with a fir-cone, rolling over the kitten, leaving my coat on a wild, briery bough, and dappling my feet in the shallow freshets; and I have felt that I have never been so happy as in that deep old pine wood in the Peak.

This was thoroughly irrational in me, of course. The happiness of our very early years is quite unconscious, and derives its peace from that very unconsciousness. If a child, or a puppy, knew he were happy, he would be analytical; and with the first moment of self-analysis the first shadow of discomfort would fall.

When I had reached the years at which I ate my truffles and macaroons, the pine wood would not have contented me.

When you wonder why you have not the enjoyment of childhood, your wonder is very idle, and the answer is simple; you have not the sublime supreme selfishness of childhood, which just enjoys, and takes no sort of heed of any woes whatever that go on around it. Childhood is an intense egotist, but an egotist whom every one conspires to gratify and caress, so that it need not take heed for itself. If the world showed the same complacent indulgence to the egotism of maturity, the mature egotist would enjoy himself as much as the new-born one.

I, being in the season of that serene infantine indifference to any and every sorrow near me, enjoyed myself in that little woodland cottage; happy, and taking no thought.

I grew extremely fond of Trust and of Reuben Dare: Avice, and I, and the cat, never liked one another. Ben always fed me before taking food himself, kept me warm with moss and wool, lighted the peat on purpose for me if I shivered, and was indeed incessantly troubled for my wants, and good to me. Avice only pulled my curls, or set the cat on me, or threw things at me for teasing her.

On the whole, that brilliant and acute social philosopher, Whyte Melville (whom I am proud to call my friend, for he has a soul that appreciates *us*), is very correct in his judgment when he avers that men have much more genuine kindness in them than women. There is a well-spring of kindliness in the hearts of many men, to which that of women is as a little shallow rivulet, noisy indeed, but of no depth or duration.

'O, why did you beat him, Fred!' cried a peeress I knew once, to her lord, referring to a street-boy who had tried to steal his purse. 'Poor little thing, so worn, so wretched! And I dare say no mother at home. You cannot think how my heart bleeds for him!'

'Gammon!' retorted his lordship. 'I gave him a thrashing because he deserved it.'

The wife with tears in her pretty eyes got out of her carriage at a great shop for French bonbons, and over the sweetmeats forgot her street Arab, then and thenceforward.

My lord—a crack shot at the pigeons, and a gay man of the world—drove down to a club where he generally went for high gaming; wrote a note there that set his people to trace the child home, paid twenty pounds a-year for him for

seven years at a school where they taught beggar boys trades, and was thanked a dozen seasons later for a kindness he had utterly forgotten, by a steady and rising young shipwright, in whom he recognised with infinite difficulty the little wretched thief he had succoured.

There is an illustration of men and women as I have found them.

Women's tears flow freely it is true; but they can so easily be diverted from their course by bonbons.

Men always say 'gammon' to sentiment, but while they say it, they feel in their pockets, and ponder what's the best thing to do.

'What sall we call ta pup, lassie?' Ben asked one day, when I had grown to a tolerable size, that is to say, about as big as a moderate rat, and when the sweet sunshine of young April was beaming through the woods, and the ground was lovely with the 'rathe primrose,' and the air radiant with the yellow butterflies, that seemed as though they were the primroses themselves that had taken wing upon the balmy winds.

'Call't? What's matter to call't aught?' said Avice sullenly. 'A beast's a beast. Baptisin' of 'em is sich gammon—'

'Nay, nay,' said Ben softly. ''Tis allus well to know a crittur as 'ee do love by some name of his'n as sounds homelike and cheery on tha ear. I mind whin I was a lad, a keeping' o' Melchisedec Stone's cows, there was three on 'em, and the Dun she was Bell, and the red 'un she was Cowslip, and the black she was Meadow-Sweets. Well, thim cows they knew their names like three childer, and they'd come for 'em right across the lees; and one day whin I was na wi' 'em, but had been give holiday an' gone a bilberry huntin' up o' tha Tor side, I clomb, an' clomb, an' clomb, till I was that high I got dazed like, and lost my feetin' upo' tha rocks, and came a hustlin' down and snapped my ankle, so I ne'er could move. Ye'll no mind o' tha time; ye was but a babe just bared.

'It were very lonesome theer, and it seemed to me as it were hours that I had laid theer hitched like among tha bracken, with a great white gleamin' limestone a' above, and the water a purlin' and a moanin' iver so far down below. I thought as how night 'ud come, and nobody'd not niver know as wheer I was; and I couldna stir for the

perishin' anguish in my feet, and it were na good to holloa out, for theer were naught i' sight save tha crows an' daws a skirlin' agen tha Tor side. An' sure my heart it were fit to break, for I were but a lad, and mither and a' lookit to me for bread, and I thought as how I'd niver see home no more.

'Weel, after awhiles, whin tha sun were gettin' very low, and tha mists was a' creepin' up, I spied a cow beneath, a grazin' on a slip o' turf just atween a rift i' tha Tor. She were a goodish long way below, but I knew her; she were Cowslip. I dunno why, but that sight o' that crittur pit soul i' me; and I shouted all I could, Cowslip, Cowslip, Cowslip! It seemed as if tha poor beastie could ne'er ha' knowed me sae long, and leave me a' alone theer to dee. And she didna.

'Cowslip, when she heared her name, she left off grazin' and listened; I called agen and agen. What did she dew? She just kem a toilin' up, an' up, an' up—they is rare climbers our hill cattle. She slipt, and stumbled, and fell about sore; but up an' up she kem, and at last wi' a rare scramble and hurtin' o' herself badly wi' brambles she reached me, and made such a to-do o'er me, an' licked me with her rough warm tongue, and was as pleased an' as pitiful as though I were her own bairn. Thin, like a Christian, she set up a voice an' mourned; mourned sae long and sae loud that they heered her down i' the vale below.

'To hear a cow mournin' like that, they knew as she were in trouble. Me they'd na ha' lookit for mebbe, even an' they'd heered me; but Cowslip were worth a deal. So they kem a searchin' an' a seekin'; an' they could see her white and red body though they could na see me; and sae they lit on me, and carried me down, an' 'twere Cowslip as saved my life. An' iver after that I hev said 'tis allus well to name the critturs an' love 'em.'

Avice said nothing; she was plucking a dead chicken for the market, and tore the plumage off lazily, yet savagely, with a curiously characteristic turn of the hand.

'What'll I call him?' pursued Ben, watching me where I played with the kitten. 'For sure he's just like them pucks an' pixies as they dew say still live i' tha green wood, and as I were that longin' ta see whin I were a boy, as I took ivery white rabbit an' ivery flushed widgeon for 'em.

I'll call him arter 'em I think. Theer's no fear as they'll be franzy,* think 'ee?'

'It doan't matter an' they be,' muttered Avice. 'Wheer's use i' 'em? They ne'er show na gowd, na no treasure, as they do say as a' fairies should; I've seed the rings where they dances, myself'; but they're a bad lot, as lives for theerselves an' dunno dew the least leetle o' good.'

Ben smiled a little dreamily.

'I dun' know why theer sud na be fairies, for sure theer's a many o' God's works as wonderful—only look at a little green beetle! Weel—an' the wee people'll na mind—we'll call ta pup Pixie or Puck.'

'Puck's the short 'un,' said Avice curtly, 'an' Puck he's allus i' mischief they say, just like that ere vermin.'

'Puck, thin,' consented her brother. 'But as for mischief, my lass, there canna be a more mischievous bairn than ye were i' a' the Peak. It's no a fault i' young things; it's jist the new-born life as works i' 'em like sae much girdin' yeast; and the more it dew work, the better ale we gits, they say 'i arter times, so it dunna dew to pit spike i' bunghole tew soon.'

Which was one of Ben's metaphorical flights which passed as high over Avice's head as the flight of northward sweeping swallows that flew by in the still April noon: and thus in the deep nest of those old green pine woods I was named after the cheery and tricksy sprite who dwelt once by the hearths, as he dwells now in the hearts, of the people of Shakespeare's England.

As soon as he had named me he took me over, on Saturday afternoon, across the wood, to a little cottage that stood near the quarry. It was a blacksmith's forge to which the cart-horses at all the little farms, round about upon the moorlands, used to be taken when they wanted shoeing.

The work must have been of the scantiest; for the farms were widely scattered and for the most part poor in cattle; but the big brawny smith looked strong enough to shoe all the wild horses of the prairies had they been brought to him. He was leaning over the half-door of his forge as Ben drew near; the ruddy glow of the fire behind him, and before all the budding green woodland depth in which his workshop was embowered.

'Gie ye godden, Ambrose,' said Ben, with that gentle

*Angry, irritated.

archaism in greeting that lingers in the pages of your old dramatists, and the mouths of your north-country peasantry; *you* never wish heaven's benison to your friends on night or morning now, when you meet with them; you only say 'how do you *do?* how do you thrive—how do you prosper—how do you employ yourself?'*

O terrible age of prose, of hurry, of avarice, and of officious occupation, which colours with its spirit even your careless casual salutation!

'Yo're rare and welcome, Ben,' said the Samson of the anvil, his broad face lighting up with a sunny wistful smile. 'Be pickaxe snappit, mebbe?'

'Na,' said Ben. 'Wark's na dune i' this'n here smithy that snap i' a score o' year. I kem to axe if so be as ye'd the leetlest mossel o' mittal as 'ud mak a ring fo' tha pup's throssle? I knaw ye'll gie it an' ye hev?'

'Sure un I will,' said the good-natured smith,' whom I had seen once or twice down at our place. 'Kem in whils I looks for him; and tak a thoct o' brid and cheese. I'll be glad to hae a crack wi' ye.'

'I'll set a bit,' answered Ben, seating himself as he spoke on a seat in the porch through whose ivied lattice-work the setting sun was streaming, while a red and green woodpecker flashed by us in its light. 'But I'll na hev victuals na drink, thank 'ee. I arena' hungered na dry.'

When I reached in after years the world of afternoon teas, of seltzers and sherries, of flower fête ices, of ladies' luncheons, of coffee and chasses, of Siraudin's bonbons, and Fortnum and Mason's hampers, I remembered this reason of his as one of the most curious I had ever heard given; —one entirely unrecognisable in the land of his betters.

'We'll mak him a brave un,' pursued the blacksmith, catching me by the throat for measurement, and setting to work at once on a little circlet of white metal which I in my innocence thought was silver. 'Tha spring she be a comin' on finely, aren't she, Ben? Tha kirrant-bushes theer be all set for fruit a'ready, and tha old apple-trees be all on the bloom. Mebbe y'll tak a lettuce, and a bit o' cress like, ta Avice?'

'Thank 'ee kindly,' said Ben, not noticing that with the name there came a glow on his friend's face that was not

* I think some one has said this before Puck:—or something to the same effect at least.—Ed.

from the smithy-fire behind him. 'Ye niver kem anigh us now—how be that?

'Weel,' said Ambrose, striking so hard at the little bit of metal that I thought he would shatter it, 'I were wishful to spik to 'ee o' that, Ben. Ye see—I'd come, and willin', ivery gloamin' an' that was all; but it wunna dew—it wunna dew—I canna fritten my heart out for tha wench; it 'ull mek a silly o' me, it will, and so I stays awa' like, and m'appen 'tis all I ken dew.'

Ben stared at him with a stupid amazement, a wondering emotion in his own gray thoughtful eyes.

'Lord's sake!' he said slowly. 'I niver thoct o' naethin' o' *that* sort, old chap! Sure an' I couldna wish for a better lot for tha little lass. Why sud it mek a fool o' ye?'—

'Why it *dew*,' muttered Ambrose, sturdily drawing his hand across his heated forehead and then hammering with redoubled force. 'An that's all about it, Ben. A man's sure a fule i' sitch things as them. Look 'ee—yest'reen was a week tha wench she were up a' Good Rest farm—ye'll mind?—a junkettin' a' St. Mark's Eve. An I've iver been soft on her—tho' I warn't free wi' yew as to't—and I got a chance like, i' that big close o' theers wheer tha sickies* grow sae thick; and said a word or tew. I hadna tha gift of the gab—them wenches they mak yew sae silly—an sae I just axed her to wed wi' me, short like; for I hae luved her, it seems ta me, iver sin she were a little un i' the cradle—'

He stopped and his strong hearty voice had a curious tremble in it, as you will see in the big sinewy frame of a bullock when they lead him out to the slaughter.

'And what did tha lass say tew 'ee?' asked Ben softly; the homely weather-beaten face of him growing infinitely tender and mournful with sympathy.

'She mocked o' me,' said Ambrose, humbly. 'Well—m'appen she were right. A big, hulking, black-visaged lout, like o' me, bean't unco fit ta tak tha fanciful thoct of a friskin' bit o' beauty like o' her.'

'She made a' mock o' yew!' cried Ben, his calm gentle face lighting up with wrath against even his best beloved.

'Na, na,' murmured the blacksmith hurriedly, unwilling, it seemed, to stir feud betwixt Ben and his one ewe-lamb

* Sycamores. The Derbyshire tongues have an Italian-like love for easy and soft abbreviations.—Ed.

even in the pain of his own passions. 'Ony as wimmin will, o' a man that canna tak their fancies. She mint naught o' malice i' that; she laughed, but tew a bit o' a lass like her it dew allus seem queer to see a big un like me afeard o' her—'

'Yew ses how shee'd heer naught o't?'

Ben's face was very darkened and troubled, and from where he sat in the ivied porch his eyes turned on to the face of his friend with a very pathetic, wistful questioning. The giant Ambrose shook his head: shaping and fashioning all the while my little piece of metal.

'Naught o't' he said simply, while his rough bronzed face grew a little white. 'Don't 'ee go for ta plague her for't, Ben. A lass canna luve ye an' she canna. I ha' done my best handiwork by her—ye're awares o' that,—but I'm tew old, and tew big, and tew gruesom, to pleasure a gay young sparrahawk jest let loose-like on tha wind.'

Ben set silent awhile, ruffling his hair in sorrowful perplexity; though he had been used to speak of the 'little lass' being 'safe to wed,' it had always, I think, been a very dim and distant possibility to him, and Avice was still a child in his sight.

'I'm dumb-foundered,' he said slowly with a sigh. 'Clean dumb-foundered. I niver drimt as ye'd a' thoct of tha wench—niver! Lack-a-day! It dew seem queer—'twarn't a day agone as 'twere that she were a little, toddlin', barefooted bairn, allus at pranks and play!'

'Na—that's trew,' assented Ambrose, who was something even older than his friend. 'Dunna be fashed wi' her, Ben, for this'n; she canna get tha better jist o' whiles o' a' her craze for fine claes an' gossips an' rompin', and sich like. But she is a bonny thing; she'll kem round sure enow—sure enow!'

But though he spoke generously he spoke sadly; and did not, I fancy, believe in his own prophecy over-much.

'It's strange as she never telled me,' murmured Ben; 'an' ye an' me sich neighbours tew!'

'M'appen she did na like?' suggested the tender-hearted smith. 'I looked but a poor fule tew her, ye know—'

'Wheerfor?' said Ben suddenly and almost sternly. 'Wheerfor? A honest maiden wouldna tell ye that: if she med a mock o' ye—'

The blacksmith rested his huge hammer on the iron.

'She didna, Ben,' he said gently, telling doubtless one of those falsehoods which here and there are even nobler than truth. 'Don't 'ee go for ta think it.' But I *were* a fule, sure now, to ga dreaming' that a rosy, buxom, gay-hearted, lissom young lass like that 'ud iver care to settle quiet-like aside such a hearthstone as this'n, wi' nothin' to tempt her o' gowd, o' pleasurin', or o' fineries. Dunna ye think more o't, Ben—I only telled ye 'cause I thoct ye should know why I hanna kem o' Moorside o' late.'

'Ye've a rare good heart o' yourn, Ambrose,' said Ben, with all his own heart in his voice; and he stretched out his hand to his old friend's grasp. The other took it, and wrung it hard;—and by common consent there was silence between them on this one subject then and thenceforward.

The smith pursued his work and finished, in what seemed to me an incredibly brief space, a little dainty shining ring of metal, light as a bent stalk of spear-grass, on whose circlet he had cut deftly with a little tool my newly-bestowed name of Puck.

How could his great massive hands, used to deal such ponderous blows, shape such a trifling toy as this? I cannot tell; I only know that a man who has the strength of the lion very often has also the tender touch of the dove.

I fancy, too, that though he was perhaps unconscious of it, the generosity moving in his heart made this herculean blacksmith of the Peak more heedful that he should pleasure his old friend now than he had ever been at any other time.

They said no more words on the theme of his rejected love; only as Ben rose to go, with a brief hearty phrase of thanks for the toy in which the smith had so willingly humoured his fancy, Ambrose pressed on him the lettuce and cress. Such vegetables grew far better in the little garden of the forge, which was sunny and of good soil, than they did in ours, where the great rose-thorn took all nourishment.

But Ben stayed his arm as he bent to cut them from the ground.

'Let be, Ambrose,' he said firmly, 'ye shanna gie o' yer substance to a lass as dunna knaw the wuth o' yer heart.'

And he was resolute to refuse them; it had gone sore

with him that the 'little lass' should have dealt a stroke of pain to an honest soul, and should have withheld a secret from himself.

Ambrose went with him a little way into the wood, so far as he could without losing sight of his cottage and forge.

'Dunno ye fash her for't,' were his last words as they parted company under a great oak. 'She's sae young and mirthfu', yer know; she dunna tell th' arm that she dew.'

And then he turned away and strode with long strides to his lonely smithy, where the red light was streaming through its mass of twilit green, as an owl's eyes glow, at even, through an ivy bush.

It was passing strange, I thought, that these two grave strong men should be so gentle over a creature who never cared how she wounded, mocked, flouted, or harmed either of them, to please her sport or charm her vanity!

When we reached home, the sun had set; Avice was nowhere to be seen; the house door stood open, and all was silent about the little place.

All day long the fowls kept it alive with sound and movement; for of all mercurial and fussy things there is nothing on the face of the earth to equal cocks and hens. They have such an utterly exaggerated sense too of their own importance; they make such a clacking and clucking over every egg, such a scratching and trumpeting over every morsel of treasure-trove, and such a striding and stamping over every bit of well-worn ground. On the whole, I think poultry have more humanity in them than any other race, footed or feathered; and cocks certainly must have been the first creatures that ever hit on the great art of advertising. Myself I always fancy that the souls of this feathered tribe pass into the bodies of journalists; but this may be a mere baseless association of kindred ideas in my mind.

The cottage was deserted and silent, the fowls being at roost. Ben, a little alarmed, strode a few yards up the hill behind his house and shouted his sister's name lustily. Ere long her voice came faintly down from amongst the bracken and firs above.

'I'm a comin'! I'm a comin'!'

And in ten minutes or so she did come, rushing hurriedly down the tangled slope; her eyes were very excited, and her face was very flushed, and her dress was in a careless disarray.

'Dinna ye hurry, lass,' cried Ben, kindly. 'Why, lawk-a-day!—how mauled and muddled ye look. What's a matter?'

'Naethin'!' said Avice pettishly, as she reached the bottom in safety, and twisted her disordered dress into some neater shape. 'But that beastly bracken, it dew tear ye so; an' tha blackberry bushes is all prickles.'

'Why was 'ee awa'?' asked Ben, wonderingly. 'It's ta late ta leave tha place by itsell.'

'I was only a gossipen a bit, wi' Nell o' Moor Farm,' she answered sullenly. 'Tain't so lively a life, is this'n, that 'ee may na hae a bit o' a crack wi' a neighbour in tha haverin.'

'Na, 'tis a goodish bit dull I know,' said Ben with a sigh, content with her explanation, though I knew by the growl which Trust gave, that he at least did not believe in the truth of it; and that he smelt some male 'gossiper' afar on the evening air. 'But, my lass, I want a word wi' ye—why didna ye tell me as Ambrose o' tha forge were wishful to wed wi' ye?'

Avice coloured, perhaps at the simple directness of the question.

'Wheer was odds o' tellin' ye?' she muttered. 'If 'ee wanna a gaby, he'd ha' kepit his counsel himsell—'

'But look'ee here lassie,' said Ben very gravely. 'Ye might be right or na niver ta till me: I wunna say which; wimmin be allus queer ta tackle i' such matters. But theer's one thing ye're no right in—an' that be i' yer makin' game o' him. Ye're pierced him i' tha quick wi yer feckless sayins. Ye mayna hae mint harm, my dear; I'm na wishfu' to lay blame ta ye; but ye may be sure o' this, Avice, that tha wench as do mak sport o' a honest man 'ull surely live ta be the sport o' rogues.'

A hot dusky anger beamed over Avice's bent face as she heard.

'D'ye think,' she muttered in sullen wrath, 'd'ye think as how cause Ambrose dunna please me, theer wunna be a braver man than him whin I want ta chuse fra' 'em?'

'I dun' know that,' said Ben very gravely. 'Ye're a poor wench, my bairn, wi' a' yer bonny looks; an' ye canna tak yer spouse a store o' granddam's siller, and a press fu' o' home-spun linen, as Nell o' Moor Farm 'ull do; an' ye've

a' the wimmin's bad word a'ready, my dearie, cause ye're sae well-favoured, an' sae saucy, an' sae slow at yer chores an' yer distaff—'

Avice burst into a loud passion of sobs and tears, as her manner was when argument told against her.

'Sae ye'd ha' me wed wi' the first lout as ax me, jist ta be rid o' my keep, and ta still tha old mithers' blisterin' tongues,' she cried furiously. 'Weel! I wunna thin. I'll na ga bury mysell i' that wretched hole o' a smithy for ye na a' tha min o' Peak-side! I wunna! I would na gie one straw ta wed, gif tha brid-groom could na set a gowd ring o' my finger, and a silken gownd o' my back, and take me to Lunnun for my moonin, and spend his siller right and left like a man! Ambrose!—he'll niver stir out o' this here beast o' a wood a' his days; I'm as weel wi' ye as wi' him.'

Ben stood with his head a little drooped upon his breast; pale under his sunny warm bronze, and hurt exceedingly by the bitter ingratitude of the raging, selfish, unfeeling words. Yet they did not break down the gentle patience of his temper; she was the 'mither's bairn,' and so sacred to him.

'Ye're verra wrong; and ye know't, my lass,' he said slowly and very gravely; 'ye know weel that tha day as 'ud tak 'ee ta anither home 'ud be tha sairest day i' a' my reckonin'; and ye know, tew, that whin I wish ye to be wife t' Ambrose, 'tis 'cause he's good, core through, an' ud' hev care o' ye a' yer days if tha stones fa' upon me, as they may surely dew ony hour o' my work i' tha quarry. Ye're fractious and fancifu', and ye quarrel as childer will, wi' a' tha best friends ye hae gotten. Weel—ye wunna see yer fault now! Ye're a woman. But ony tak heed, Avice, that the day dew niver dawn whin, wi' yer beauty, an' yer fancies, an' yer fearfu' craze for riches, ye dunna wish, an' wish in vain, lassie, that ye'd stayed safe i' my heart an' i' Ambrose's!'

And then, as though he dared not trust himself to say more, lest his voice should break down into a woman's weakness, Ben passed slowly within, across his threshold, with the saddest shadow on his honest face that I had ever seen there.

Their evening meal was eaten in total silence that night; but there was a deeper and a sweeter tone than ever in the murmured words of thanksgiving and prayer with which he commended his little household to the care of God.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SABBATH-BREAKER.

Ben was infinitely kind to me. When I got a little older, as the primroses were supplanted by the hyacinths, he used to take me with him to the quarry, Trust carrying me in his mouth if I tired. I think they both knew that, when they were absent, Avice and the cat were too much for me.

I grew to feel a great deal of respect and affection for Ben in those days by the quarry. To look at him he was like any other labouring man, strong, rough, with his back a little bent, and his hands all over muscle from the daily use of the weighty pickaxe. He was very quiet too, and some of his fellows called him stupid. But he was not that; he had a quaint gentle wisdom of his own, though he was utterly unlettered, and so simple in trustfulness that a child could easily deceive him.

Trust was right, as, looking back on that time, I know now, in thinking that Ben had some touch in him of the poet. Not of the poet's utterance surely; I do not think he could have strung a line of words together to save his existence; but of the poet's temperament, of the poet's feeling.

He would spend long moments gazing into a little tuft of wood-anemones or of bluebells, with just the same look that your Burns must have had when he gazed at the 'wee crimson-tippit flower.' If a bird were wounded by some scattered stone that flew from under his hammer, he took it up and tended it with the same thought in his face that your Coleridge must have felt when he wrote.

His fellow-workmen always complained that Ben in his leisure went mooning about; but his mooning afforded him more pleasure than their ale and pitch-and-toss lent to them. He would go wandering about in the wood or on the moorland whenever he had any spare time, with no knowledge whatsoever, but with a curiou comprehension and sympathy in him for all living things that were; from the tiniest spray of the moss under his feet, to the large-eyed oxen that came to rub against his shoulders in homely caress.

Sunday was a well-beloved day with Ben; there was no

church within four miles, and he did not care to go to it. Now and then its pastor found his way to the cottage, and rated Ben as a heathen.

'M'appen I be, sir,' Ben would say sorrowfully, not sure in his mind whether he were wicked or not.

'I canna go to the church,' he said once when much goaded on the subject. 'Look'ee, they's allus a readin' o' cusses, and damnin, and hell fire, and the like; and I canna stomach it. What for shall they go and say as all the poor old wimmin i' tha parish is gone to the deil 'cause they picks up a stick or tew i' hedge, or likes to mumble a charm or tew o'er their churnin'? Them old wimmen be rare an' good i' ither things. When I broke my ankle three year agone, old Dame Stuckley kem o'er, i' tha hail and the snaw, a matter of five mile and more, and she turned o' eighty; and she nursed me, and tidied the place, and did all as was wanted to be done 'cause Avice was away, waking somewheres; and she'd never let me gie her aught for it. And I heard ta Passon tell her as she were sold to hell, 'cause the old soul have a bit of belief like in witch-stones, and allus sets one aside her spinnen'-jenny so that the thrid shanna knot nor break. Ta Passon he said as how God cud mak tha thrid run smooth, or knot it, just as He chose, and 'twas wicked to think she could cross His will; and the old dame, she said "Weel, sir, I dinna believe tha Almighty would ever spite a poor old crittur like me, don't 'ee think it. But if we're no to help oursells i' this world, what for have He gied us the trouble o' tha thrid to spin? And why no han't He made tha shirts an' tha sheets an' tha hose grow theersells?" And ta Passon niver answered her that, he only said she was fractious and blas-*phe*-mous. Now she warn't, she spoke i' all innocence, and she mint what sha said—she mint it. Passons niver can answer ye plain, right-down natural questions like this'n, and that's why I wunna ga ta tha church.'

He did not go; Avice did, arrayed in all her glory of earrings and of beads, journeying thither in the donkey-cart of their only near neighbour. An old woman, who drove about the country with ferns and greenery of all kinds, and took her poor worn beast eight miles on its only day of rest, for the very good and notable reason that 'ta Passon ware a rare un for ferns and tha like; and if I warna to be

seed i' my seat 'o Sabbath day, he'd niver buy no more on me. It's main and particular is ta Passon ; he canna abide Sabbath-breakers.'

And she always beat the tired ass violently and often, that she might reach the church whilst yet the chimes were ringing. She was a woman who had taken heed to the 'passon's' counsel.

Meanwhile the Sabbath-breaker spent his Sabbath mornings out of doors, amongst the things of which he was fondest—the birds and the beasts, and the trees and the heather.

It was in a very unlearned, desultory, dreamy fashion, of course, that he studied them : all the divinity that lies in books was hidden from poor Ben ; but he did study them in his own way, and he found many curious things of their lives, and their natures, and their habits, which, if he had only known how to tell his discoveries again, might have ranked him with Audubon and Stanley.

'I just am fond o' tha things, ye see, and so they lets me know about 'em,' he would say ; unconscious that he was the exponent of the great doctrine of sympathy.

The teal in the brake-hidden ponds ; the hen-harrier amongst the sedges ; the timid hare under the ferns ; the pretty redstart on the boughs ; the small dark stoat wading amongst the huge leaves of the burdock ; the corn-crake in the scarce patches of wheat that grew, here and there, on the bleak brown moors ; the tiny chiffchaff flitting under the gorze all golden with legend-loved bloom ; the field-mouse sitting, squirrel-like, by her little home in the ground, where the sweet shady plumes of the meadow-sweet hid her in safety from the eyes of the kite : all these were his friends and familiars ; and he would wander amongst them all through the hours of the quiet day, when not even the far-off sounds of the quarry, or of the husbandmen above on the moor farms, broke the sweet, restful, morning silence.

Avice, sitting at church, glancing under her arching brows at the youths beside her, arrayed in her beads and her ear-rings, and gazing with her envious eyes at the manor pew, where the great folks were sequestered, received many praises from the pastor for her assiduity in attending the service.

Ben he called hard names, of which a heathen was not the least.

Now Avice on her homeward-way beat the donkey with fury and might, because her soul was sore to think of the great ladies up in the Squire's red-canopied pew. But Ben going to the fern-seller's cottage to meet his sister, went first to the stable and shook down a fresh bed of bracke , and filled a pail with water from the spring, and threw a great arm-load of sweet grasses and juicy thistles into he rusty rack.

Which of the two would the poor tired beast—if he could have given an opinion*—have thought the most faithful follower of the teaching of One who walked in the fields on the Sabbath day, and rode on an ass to Jerusalem?

These Sundays with Ben were my greatest delight. To scamper over the boundless moorland; to roll in the short scented thyme; to watch with wondering eyes the squirrels leap from branch to branch; then, lying tired, to sleep and dream, and wake in the pleasant drowsy sunlight: all this made a paradise of that old silent pinewood to me, and, in a sense too, to my master himself.

His eyes used to have a curiously-contented look, half brightness, half sadness, but great contentment for all that as he strode through the yielding spear-grass, or lay at length under the shade of the branches.

He did not speak often; but now and then he did, to Trust or to me, or to the cushat in the boughs, or to the rabbit beneath the brushwood, or to some other timid moving thing. And at such times his voice was so gentle, so pitiful, so serious, that it had a sound in it, to my fancy, like that of the evening bells when they rung faintly in from the distance across the broad moors.

Whatever good I have kept in me—and in the world it is very hard to keep any—I owe it to Ben on those still Sunday mornings, in those deep old quiet green woods.

There was one spot I specially loved: it was a dell formed by huge boulders of granite and gritstone fallen one on another; grown all over by ferns and by moss, and by all manner of foliage; and always full of shade even in the hottest noontide.

* I find our friend Puck is not much more liberal after all than the rest of creation; and conceives that no race save his own possesses any intelligence!—Ed.

There Ben would lie for hours, looking up at the blue dreamful sky, or at the birds moving in the thick leafage.

'And to think,' he murmured once, 'as the same Hand as shattered down tha mighty stones here, till they lays crushed and o'ergrowed wi' the grasses, yit fashioned them wee blue wing-feathers of tha atomy of a tomtit i' his nest theer. It is wonderfu'! Shanna we niver know how't was done? niver see the sun a bit nearer? Lord's sake! I canna but wish that He'd ha thoct of some ither way o' food for keepin' the varsal world fu' o' his critturs, than tha way o' 'em murderin' one anither, preying on one anither, from tha man on tha ox tew tha sparrow on tha worm. It don't seem right like; as how Him who'd tha power o' makin' that sun move i' tha heavens, shouldna' ha bin able to hit a' some better means for keepin' tha life He giv i' us wi' out pittin' tha lusts in our souls to kill tha weakest things aside o' us. It's uncommon queer—an' sad tew, as ta seem—that tha should na be ony way o' livin' save by dith.'

And so the dim, wise, tender, untutored mind perplexed itself in sorrowful pondering: and Ben, who could scarce tell one letter from another, puzzled over problems that the sages and the scholars of the world cannot solve.

If Ben had had education, I think he would have been a man of whom the world would have heard somewhat; for he had all the strange mingling of acuteness and childlikeness, of fine perception and foolish faithfulness, that are so often characteristic of genius. As it was, never having even learned to read, and having from the seventh year of his age been obliged to get up in the gray of the mornings, and go forth to hard incessant, bodily labour that killed the brain in him, as it were—so that when he returned at night he had no sense to do more than to creep up to his truckle-bed and sleep the heavy dreamless sleep of over-toil and of over-fatigue—he had never had any culture of the powers within him. None could tell what ever they might, under another existence, have proved; and it was only through the fairness of nature around him, and the insight he had by instinct into its beauties and mysteries, that he kept alive at all those tender thoughts which, so sweet to the scholar, or the artist, or the noble, are perhaps only full of a dim bewildered pain to the poor man in whom they exist.

I did not discern all this myself, of course; but Trust did, and through Trust I came to see it.

Ben Dare's love for his sister was wonderful; he seemed to see none of her faults, save that ever-craving of gold, of which now and then he so gently warned her. But even his perception of this blemish in her never brought the fact, or the suspicion thereof, to his mind that she had indeed taken his coins from under the apple-tree. No vague fancy of the truth ever occurred to him; he trusted Avice with all his heart and soul, and though many times one could observe that she was an anxiety and a disappointment to him, and that her sullen, ungrateful words not seldom wounded him sorely, he never spoke a harsh phrase to her, and only thought her guilty of 'pettishness' such as often besets a spoilt child.

She was not contented, he knew; but then, as he was wont to say if he spoke to any fellow-workman on the matter, ''tis ony tha gaiety-like o' girlhood, look you; they're often like that i' their fust years. 'T 'ill wear off sure-ly wi' time; and m'appen she'll get wed, you know—she's sae pretty—and thin wi' tha childer comin', an' that, a nursin' 'em and a pratin' tew 'em, an' a tidyin' o' 'em, she'll forgit a' these little maggits o' fancies an' fineries, and sittle down good an' quiet; I'm sure o' it.'

But he was not quite sure in his own heart; and he was disquieted oftentimes for Avice; and took blame to himself because he did not make the house 'alive' enough to amuse a young girl; and worked extra hours, early and late, that he might earn more money to replace that stolen from him, and give her some gift or some treat with it—some fairing, some daintier food, or some new bit of apparelling.

'I allays feel, ye know, as if tha mither was a watchin' o' me,' he said once to his only friend, after Ambrose of the Forge, a man like himself, in the quarry. 'She axed me a' dyin', poor soul, to hae a care o' that little 'un; and I dew think if anythin' went wrong wi' Avice, 't 'ud vex mither sore, where'er she be,—for tho' they may gae to heav'n, I'll niver b'lieve as they forgits all us down here, or gets hard as stones to what happen till us.'

'Maybe no, Ben,' retorted his brother-in-labour poking his hands ruefully among his tumbled yellow hair, all white with the powder of the shattered limestone. 'I often worders as how them as is a singin' wi' tha angels—as they *says* they be—can sing i' tune an' time like, whin they knows all

as is a happenin' to their frinds and their childer below. I suppose they dunna fash theirselves about it; but 'ee hev to git main an' hard like, afore 'ee can be a angel.'

Thereon he finished his noon-day bit of bacon and bread, and sent his pickaxe with ringing strokes into the stone: he lived on the other side of the wood, three miles nearer the village church, at which he was a leader in the quire.

'I s'uld niver do for a angel,' he muttered, as he lifted the axe. 'Why—t'other Sunday when my old tirrier, Bee, as you'll well mind un, died o' that lump i' her throat a Sunday mornin', I couldna git my voice at all for thinkin' o' tha good old crittur; and I had to gie o'er afore the "Glory be," and go outside aneath tha yew, and I was a cryin' like a child there—'cause 't old Bee was stiff an' cold. If you'd seen her look, Ben,—her look at me till tha verra last!'

Ben was too much a pagan to rebuke his friend; or to insist that the 'Glory be' should have been too solemn and awful in its nature for any thought of the dead terrier to have intruded on it, and spoilt the mellow notes of its best bass singer.

In this simple, healthful, open-air life I throve apace, and became exceedingly beautiful and graceful, as I could tell by looking at myself in the clear mirror of the bright running water. If my forefathers and brethren had all died at the Hall, I can only imagine that their lamentable decease must have been caused by velvet cushions and meat-surfeitings. I have often witnessed the melancholy results of epicureanism on members of my noble race.

I throve certainly, and grew to my full size; which never exceeded that of a small rabbit; nor ought indeed to have exceeded it, for the virtue and worth of my people lie in their diminutiveness, as do those of Elzevirs and of Parliamentary consciences.

Even old Dick, the pedlar, who 'could na abide dogs,' observed me when he came again in Ben's absence one day in the summer; and remarked that I was a rare nice un surely, an' wurth a sight o' siller,' he guessed. Ever after that unhappy speech, Avice regarded me with more favour, but with a glance excessively like to that with which a hawk surveys a lark.

Once she asked her brother,

'Wunna ye niver sell ta pup, Ben? 'Tis pretty, and sae glossy an' white, I believe ye'd get a pund for't, an' 'twere well chaffered for—'

Ben glanced at her with a grave look in his eyes, under which she was silent and restless.

'I shall niver sell ta pup, lass,' he said. 'I dunna mak a thing fond o' me and rear it wi' trouble, jist to barter it awa' to strangers, who might tormint it for aught I might tell.'

Avice said no more; she knew that there were things on which her gentle and patient brother was inflexible, and even obstinate, however yielding he might be usually to her varied caprices.

I myself heard this decision with infinite gladness, for I knew nothing then of the great world, and I loved the pinewood and the moor. I had my liberty, I had kindness, and I had sunshine: a young thing would be very envious indeed that asked, or desired, more.

So the whole, long, golden summer passed; the drowsy bees humming over the countless flowers; the white and rose heaths covering the turf with a maze of soft colour; the limestone rock flushing under the red glowing rays of the sunsets; the water-birds floating all day long in the amber light over the beds of the waving sword-reeds; the trout darting by in the clear shallow water, and hiding their pretty white backs under stones.

The summer was delightful to me; and to Ben it had a dim divine charm, that made the mere sense of living sweet to him, despite all his toil.

Even Avice loved the 'summer-time,' as your German singers call it fondly; it broke the monotony of her life; it brought stray wanderers over the moors; it sent an artist or two into the heart of this old dusky fragrant wood; it was the season of harvest homes, and of several wakes in the villages that lay nearest. And Avice, although so idle with her 'chores' (*i. e.* housework), and so indifferent to exertion, would walk ten miles any day on the chance of a dance at night, and a supper in some little outlying farm, or some village alehouse where, Ben not being by, 'she wore her 'dimonds,' and eclipsed every girl who might foot it there. Whenever she returned from one of these pleasurings she was trebly sullen, and ill at ease always afterwards

But we were the sufferers from that, not she; and so the consideration of the 'hard stone in the sweet date' no more deterred her from seizing and devouring her date, than it deterred her sex in the early days of the East.

Ben used now and then to offer some gentle remonstrance against this absolute devotion to gaiety, when its god was worshipped under the questionable roofs of pot-houses; but Avice always made out that she was going with some good old dame whose presence would have sanctioned the very revels of Bacchus or of Priapus themselves, and he had not the heart to restain her from the few enjoyments that broke the monotony of her years.

A well-dressing, a wake, a dance, a wedding feast, were such delight to 'the lass,' he reckoned; it would have been 'unked' to have begrudged her those little mirthful frivolities of a girl's earliest youth. To go with her himself was impossible; he had to be at his labour by sunrise, and did not leave it till sunset, whether he were at the quarry, or, when stone work was slack, at the farms. He could only trust her; and he did trust her, with that entire faith which all loyal natures give until—they are paid with the coin of deceit.

'I fear as how the wench is a goin' wrong,' said the man who had lamented the loss of Bee once, at the quarry, to his wife when she brought him the noon-day 'bit and sup.' 'She's allays a junkettin' somewheres,—or if she bean't junkettin' she's a mopin'; which is m'appen worser of the tew. And they do say as how she's a gay 'un; and as how young Isaac up a tha flour mill and she be arter no good. But I doubt'n of fashen Ben about it. I might dew more harm na good?'

'Dinna ye meddle, Tam,' said his wife, who was a shrewed woman. 'It's niver no good a threshin' other folks' corn; ye allays gets the flail agin i' ye own eye somehow.'

'Mebbe,' said her lord, 'I would na mind gettin' hit if I saved ta corn by threshin' it; but I dunna see how I suld rightly. The lass ud say na, and Isaac ud say na, o'course, and Ben ud niver change a word wi' me agin.'

So not even Friendship dared to tear the band off Ben's eyes.

Friendship, when it is not a bully, is very commonly a coward.

When the summer had passed, and it was the first warm mellow touch of autumn that flushed the leaves, and made the waters flow faster, and shook the brown cones off the fir-trees, one of Avice's beloved days of junketing came round with unusual honours.

It was 'wake-week' at a little town some twelve miles away, and in addition to the wakes' singing and dancing and feasting, there were a fair and a circus and various other wonders. So at least old Dick o' tha Wynnats, making his quarterly visit with Michaelmas, informed her with much unction and imaginative description in reward for the money she laid out with him—three whole shillings veritably her own from her poultry-yard; the hens being the only things of which she took any real care, because they brought her in some silver with the outlay of which Ben never interfered.

Ben dearly liked a smoke of his pipe, out-of-doors in the still twilight in summer, or by his hearth in the winter. But of late he had not smoked at all, because it 'pit wings to the siller, my lass,' as he told her; because, as Trust told me, he was trying hard to make up by Michaelmas that sovereign's worth which the thief's appropriation had prevented his possessing at Midsummer.

'It's all in a hole in the timber under his bed,' said Trust; 'he don't put faith in the apple-tree money-box any more. And even she does not know of this, or it would not be long quiet in his old stocking in that wood cranny.'

For whichever purpose it was, however, that he saved his tobacco money, he went without his one enjoyment all through the soft hot summer. Avice knew it, and saw him cast now and then a wistful glance at the unfilled pipe. There was abundance of tobacco in old Dick's pouch; but she did not purchase three-penny-worth of it out of her egg-money. She only bought some yards of bright scarlet ribbon, some yards of common lace, some mock amber beads for her throat, and a very small jaunty straw hat.

'Ye'll come ower, sure?' pressed old Dick. 'Why, lawk a mercy, 't'ill be sich a sight as hanna be seed i' the country sin th' old King o' the Peak wint to glory hundreds of years agone. There is a lot o' play-actors a comin'—and ye niver seed a play?'

'Nay!' assented Avice with a sigh, 'I niver did; what does they dew?'

'Lord sake, my dearie, I could na tell 'ee,' said Dick, with much solemnity. 'It's all lyin'—all lyin', iviry bit, —most butiful! There's fallers a cryin' their hearts out as was laughin' fit to kill theirsells a minit afore. There's kings wi' crowns o' gowd on as was jist common men, wi' pipes i' their mouths, tew seconds agone. There's ugly trapezin' mawthers o' gals, as one would na ha' picked out o' street, all smilin' and rosy, and jew'lled and lovely like, wi' the people a clappin' an' a cheerin' on em' like mad. 'Tis all lyin', ye knaw; theer's tha beauty on it; and tha folks they goes and take on so as niver was, and b'lieve it like Scriptur they do. Why, I've seed un a kickin' a woman as laid on doorstep i' tha open street (a' least the constable he got a kickin' o' her, and tha crittur moaned, and tha folk about laughed at it as a rare good joke; she'd a been clemmed by the way, she could na get a bit o' bread nohow); weel! and I seed 'em that self-same night, tha self-same folks i' tha playhouse, a cryin' and a clamourin', and a rockin' theersells to an' fro wi' grief a'cause a queen on the stage had pisoned herself out o' rage and jealously. O' tha lyin's uncommon good, 'tis sure to move 'em a deal more'n ony tha fac' itsell.'

Avice listened intently.

'But 'ee sed,' she began eagerly, 'as how ugly mawthers were took i' tha play and med beautiful. Weel-favoured wimmin thim must be—must be—'

'Dazzlin' like the sun, my wench!' said Dick emphatically. 'O' course tha beauties allus looks tha best. Lawk-a-deary me, why if a pretty gell git o' tha stage, she'll go wed a duke afore Christmas!'

'But how does 'ee git theer!' asked Avice with panting breast.

Dick looked very thoughtful, but he winked his eye with dull unction.

'Eh, ma dear, I dun' know. I is na a pretty gell. But I think as how if I *was* un I'd jist go wheer a playhouse were; and I'd walk in and I'd ax to see the gintleman as kips it; and I'd show him ma bonny face and my bonny fute, and a' tha gowd o' ma hair, and I would na doubt much as he'd pit me on tha boords.'

Avice listened breathlessly.

'A'out money?' she asked.

'Well,' said Dick, 'there *is* some as pays money to git theer, I know; but a handsome wench—she ha' got her siller i' her eyes and her lips. If I were ye, Avice, I'd hev a try, that I 'ud, i' tha wake-week. He could na but say ye nay.'

She listened thirstily, and with longing, wondering gaze.

'But I is na bright?' she said, sullenly. 'Clever, ye knaw—I canna read but a bit or tew.'

Dick snapped his fingers.

'Wimmen as good-lookin' as ye, lassie, need na larn theer A B C! But m'appen ye would na like to leave Isaac,' he added slily. 'He's a strappin' lad, sure-ly.'

'I'd leave *him* this minnit!' she said savagely, twisting to and fro her yards of new scarlet ribbon.

'Ye'r wispin' tha ribbon, ma dear,' said Dick calmly; then he bent towards her and whispered in her ear: 'Ben dinna know o't?'

She coloured scarlet as her ribbons over her face and bosom, as she murmured back a faint negative.

'Thin, my wench, git awa' soon, to playhouse o' somewheres if ye're wise,' muttered Dick, still in her ear, with a chuckle and a grin. Avice, still with the hot flush on her face and tingeing still her swelling breast, shook him off and went within. The old man, still chuckling to himself, climbed slowly up the hill to the Moorside.

'She'll go ta playhouse,' I heard him mutter. 'And tha dukes will rin mad ower Isaac's cast-off! Lawk-a-day! the lords' light-o'-loves is allus a honest man's leavin's!'

CHAPTER VII.

HIS FIRST BETRAYAL.

It was autumn-time; and work being slack at the quarry, Ben went 'a ploughin',' to the various farmsteads lying around;—little clusters of white or gray buildings, with roofs of thatch or red tile, that broke here and there the dark blue of the distant pine woods, the purple of the hills, or the green of the woods and meadows.

Mounting the slope behind our cottage to its highest point, where it became moorland, and shelved down again on the other side, you could see for thirty miles about on

every side, and many of these little homesteads caught your sight, nestled in the dip of a valley, caught in the clift of a rock, or perched on the brow of a hill. Some few of these were far too distant to allow him to go and come to them in the day, and he slept where his work chanced to be. At such times I missed him greatly; and Trust sat with a grave anxious countenance on the doorsill, every now and then awaking the echoes with a short woe-begone howl.

He was going for six days' agricultural work to a farm near Ashford-in-the-Water on the same week that the 'wakes,' so strongly eulogised by the pedlar, were to take place; and Avice, on the Sunday night before his departure, pleaded hard with him for permission to go thither for the great day of all. Old Dame Smedly, the fern-seller, was going, she urged, and would take her.

'It's tew far for tha donkey to kem and go i' twelve hours, my lass,' he objected, 'and I dunna like for ye to sleep fra' hame. Least o' all, tew, i' that town where I dunna knaw a soul.'

'But Dame Smedly dew, Ben,' persisted his sister. 'She hev a half-cousin, an unco' decent man, as own a Public theer, and we culd sleep i' his house tha night, and thin back agen wi' marn. Ye knaw ye've axed her to be wi' me here whiles ye're on tha tramp.'

'I'm no' goin' on tramp, lass,' said Ben, a trifle annoyed. 'I'm a goin' tew Ashford i' tha Water; ye mind it right on well. A Public bean't tha sort o' place for ye, my dearie; there's allus a lot of men a' skittles, and bad wimmim a trolloping about.'

'It's a very 'spectable house, Ben!' moaned Avice. 'And I think it shame to cast foul words agin the old dame's folks, as is a main deal better off than us aren't.'

'I dinna cast no words at 'em,' said Ben patiently. 'I ony ses, as I allays ses, that a Public ain't a place for sich a wench as yew.'

'It's tha ony roof I can sleep under, Ben!—and to lose this wakin' will kill me, it well! There's a fair, and merry-go-rounds, and play-actin', and conjurin', and lots o' dancin';—an' I didna think ye'd be so cruel as to do me out o't! Whin I sees nothin' in this lonely hole fra one year's end to t'other!'

And Avice burst into tears; using the great weapon of her sex without stint or scruple.

Of course Ben gave in, and let her have her way; the more quickly, though not the more readily, because he knew well that if he did not let her have it, she would take it,—the moment his back was turned.

'Gie me a kiss, my lass,' he said sadly, when the storm had passed, and she consented to smile through her tears. 'Mebbe ye wunna be up afore I'm off to-morro'.'

She kissed him willingly; with pretty caressing ways and words.

Surely Judas must have been a woman disguised?

With the first gray streak of the morning, he went on his way, over the hills to the Wye-watered dales, where his labour lay, among the golden-brown woods of the autumn.

He signed Trust gently back with his hand, and bid him stay and mind the place; my head he touched lightly and fondly.

'Good-bye, little un,' he murmured kindly; 'I'll soon be wi' ye agin.'

Then he went; through the gray, damp, vaporous air, that was like clouds of steam over all the hills, and whitened as snow all the valleys. There had been no one up to set his breakfast, or to bid him God speed.

As he drew the door after him, and left us alone in the feeble, sickly light of the solitary rush-candle by which he had groped his way to the poor meal he had eaten, Trust threw up his head and gave his long wailing agonised howl.

'That won't bring him back?' I hazarded, for the noise made me feel so miserable.

'I know that!' said Trust sharply. 'Howling won't bring a dead sheep to life, but many are the dead sheep I have howled over; where they lay stiff and frozen, down in a snow-drift, poor fools. Though we can't help things, we grieve for them. If you never do that when you are grown up, you will be as hard as a stone—or a woman!'

After which answer, he recommenced his lamentations, with much seeming relief to himself; until Avice opened her door, and called to him to be quiet, or 'she'd bang his head off his shoulders.'

His reply to this was another howl, only louder, shriller, and more prolonged than ever. She sent a piece of heavy wood flying at him, down the stairs.

Trust watched it coming, got out of its way, and with much contentment saw it shiver the little angle of looking-

glass on the wall. Then, satisfied with his vengeance, he composed himself into a ball, and was silent.

Trust and I had a bad life for the next three days with Avice, and the old woman, Smedly; we should have had a worse, only that they were fearful of him when he growled, and this he did, very nearly unceasingly, from morning till night.

On the third day, the husbandman on the Moor Farm borrowed Trust to help him bring in some sheep from a distant part of the moor on which they had been turned out for the late summer graze, and I saw my only friend leave me, with a sinking at my heart—a foreboding of what ill I could not tell.

The fourth morning was that on which Avice and the dame were going to the wakes; and the donkey-cart was at the door by six o'clock of the dawn.

I had understood that 'Nell o' the Moor Farm' had promised to look after me, in recompense for the loan of Trust at the sheep-fetching. So I was amazed and frightened when Avice—wondrous to behold in the diamonds, and the lace, and a very bright blue print dress, and the morsel of a hat, all aglow with the scarlet ribbons—jammed me into one of those quaint brown willow-baskets, peculiar to that district, shut the lid with only a peep-hole for air, and set me up on the cart with her bundles and the old woman's red cloak.

I moaned, I whined, I yelped, I made all the uproar I knew how; but it was of no avail; they did not heed me; the cart went jogging on its way.

Through the chinks of the basket I looked at the little cottage, like a robin's-nest in an ivy bush, with the white morning mists hovering above it on the great hill slope, and the bright brown brook running by its door.

Alas! I never saw it again.

The road which the cart took was not up the hill and across the moors; it penetrated the whole width of the wood, and then went through a shallow 'sough'* of water, which was in winter too swollen to allow of any thoroughfare that way; and then passed over the brow of a steep stony slope, and so got at last into a high road, called, like a score of others in the country, the Derby road.

* A small lagoon, such as is called in Norfolk 'a broad.'

My heart died utterly, as we were dragged this weary length, in a progress only interrupted by the dead pauses of the donkey, and the loud blows rained upon his back. I thought of Trust, running, leaping, barking, so joyously, so excitedly, so full of eagerness and of importance, on the far-away purple moor bringing home the sheep—if he only had known!

For I had no sort of doubt or hope left in me; I knew that she was going to sell 'tha pup,' as well as though I had heard her proclaim aloud her wicked intent.

The journey seemed endless to me; we jogged at last into a little clean, old-fashioned, stone-built town, shady with many trees, and with a noble ancient church in the centre of its market-place. I should think it was usually as quiet as its own graveyard; but now in wake week it was thronged with men and women and children from all the outlying villages. Its church bells were ringing merrily and madly; its market-place was thronged with booths, and shows, and sports, and flags; and outside a wooden building, on a platform, there were the play-actors of the pedlar's legend, strutting to and fro in all the glory of gold, and silver, and velvet robes, and waving plumes, while one gorgeous creature in scarlet and amber blew his trumpet loudly, and proclaimed the performance of the night.

'Lawk a mussy, look!' I heard Avice cry out, 'O, ain't it beautiful? What I 'ud give to ony be that girl wi' the short pink skirt, and the silver shoon, and that crown upo' her head!'

I could have told her that she had looked a thousand times prettier herself, washing in the burn, with her linen kirtle tucked up to her knees, and her white arms and bosom coming forth from the brown leathern bodice like white moss roses out of russet autumn leaves.

But if I could have spoken, what use would it have been to have told such a truth as that to a woman? With all their egregious vanity—voracious of flattery as a fish of food—they are always distrustful of themselves when arrayed in the garment of simplicity.

At another time I should have thought the market-place a gay scene enough, in its way, with its colour, movement, noise, and mirth; and that rich blue sky of the dying summer over all the quaint peaked roofs.

As it was, I was wretched.

We stopped at a dirty tumble-down little ale-house, which a gaudy sign proclaimed as the 'Miners' Joy;' there were lead mines the other side of the town in the heart of a luxuriant woodland, once a royal chase. Here Avice and her companion were noisily welcomed; and she. for that matter, embraced by a knot of men before the 'Public's' door, of whom one was her host.

She laughed a little with them; drank a draught of spiced ale, then took me up-stairs in my basket to her room. When she had put the finishing touches of finery to herself, she went out of the attic with a loud slam to the rickety door, and left me to my meditations, which were none of the brightest.

It was now near the hour of sunset.

Through the thin wattled walls of the 'Public,' and through the open lattice, I could hear the various voices—now of a man and a woman who seemed husband and wife, and were in the adjoining garret—now of the persons gathered drinking in the wide thatched porch below.

'Thar go the wench,' said one of the former, the wife I think by her voice, by which I suppose Avice was meant. 'She hev trim limbs o' hern, she hev—kiver ground like a Polly-wash-the-dish-up.'*

'Esau bean't a losin' time,' said the man, with a grin in his voice. 'Theer's his arm about her a'ready.'

'She's a willin' un,' sighed his wife sadly. 'She dunno let grass grow a'neath her shoon i' courtin.'

'She's abuve Esau, tew,' said the husband. 'She axed jist now how many dukes theer was i' England—'

'What did tell her?'

'Sed as theer warn'a but one. An' there is na. Ony *our* duke, old woman.'

'No, for sure. But what could gell want wi' dukes?'

'She's franzy wi' her bit o' oat-cake; an' mad for a plum 'un,' answered the other allegorically. 'It's thim chip news-sheets as dew mischief ta gells and lads; makin' em' quar'l wi' their lot, and git sae cock-a-whoop and fulish as theer's nae standin' 'em.'

'And that's trew. But un mun knaw how world wags?'

'Why mun ye?' grumbled the man. ''Taint naught

* A water-wagtail.

t'ye. Ye mind yer kittle biles, and yer hin s lay, an' yer cabbage dunna get worums, and yer childer dunna tell lies to 'ee—that's wot ye've gotten ta dew. World dunna want 'ee, 'tis big enow to take care o' itsell—'

'Sure I'm allus slavin' for childer,' said his wife, with something like a sob.

'Ye lets 'em lie,' growled the other. 'Littlest 'un, he told me a wopper yest'reen. I gie him a rare crack o' pate for 't. Reddin' news-sheets an' pratin' o' world, whiles worums gits at yer greens, an' lies comes pat ta yer bairns —that's just screeching at neighbour's chimbley-smoke, an' lettin' yer ain place burn ta ashes.'

Here the conjugal discussion was drowned by the tones of the men in the porch, who were talking political economies—after their light.

'Times is bad i' Suffeck?' said one voice with an inquiring accent in it.

'Main bad,' concurred another which had not the north-country speech that is Chaucer-like and full of a curious unconscious poetry, but had instead the whine of East Anglia that is as like the New England whine as the call of one chaffinch is like to another. 'Six shillin' a week is a'most all as iver ye git. Theer won't be no corn growed soon, if pipple starve-like a-farmin' as we does.'

'Six shillin' a week!' ejaculated the miner. 'Women git as much at mill?'

'Hey?' said the Suffolk man. 'And a shillin' or tenpence every week out o' that for landlord. We niver gits a taste o' meat, years end t' year's end. And when flour's riz, it's all as ye can dew to kip body and soul tegither.'

'Where's Suffeck?' asked some other person. 'I' Americay?'

'Americay! Ye're a born nat'ral. It's somewheres i' tha south, ain't it, George?'

'Iss,' assented the Suffolk George. ''Tis all butifull and flat as yor hand theer, none o't broke up into these nasty mounds o' yourn as is ony made to lame man and beast. Ye may walk hunderds o' miles i' Suffeck, and hev it all as smooth and as nice as a mawther's ap'on wi' the starch in.'

'But ye dunna get good wage?' said the miner with practical wisdom.

'We doan't,' confessed the East Anglican, 'we doan't

And that theer botherin' machinery as do the threshin', and the reapin', and the sawin', and the mowin', hev a ruined us. See!—in old time, when ground was frost bit or water-soaked, the min threshed indoors, in barns, and kep in work so. But now the machine, he dew all theer is to dew, and dew it up so quick. There's a many more men than theer be things to dew. In winter-time measter he doan't want half o' us; and we're just out o' labour, and we fall sick cos' o' naethin' to eat; and goes tew parish—able-bodied min strong as steers.'

'Machine's o' use i' mill-work,' suggested one of the northerners.

'O' use! ay o' coorse 'tis o' use—tew tha measters,' growled the East Anglican. 'But if ye warn't needed at yer mill cos the iron beast was a weavin' and a reelin' and a dewin' of it all, how'd yer feel? Wi' six children, mebbe, biggest ony seven or eight, a crazin' ye for bread. And ye mayn't send 'em out, cos o' labour-laws, to pick up a half-penny for theerselves; and tha passion be all agin yer, cos ye warn't thrifty, and didn't gev a penny for the forrin blacks out o' the six shillin' a week? Would you think iron beast wor o' use thin? or would yer damn him hard?'

'He speak up well,' hallooed one of the miners, with a thump upon the table.

'I'll speak agin *him* any day,' said the Suffolker with fierce emphasis. 'Why, look'ee, I'm better off nor most. I'd some schoolin' when I was a brat; and I scraped and scraped till I got a cow, and I can make ends meet a bit, wi' the butter in summer-time. But there's a swarm o' men in the parish as dunno more'n tha beasts in stye. Dunno their God; dunno their letters; never heard o' tha Queen; never put a mossel o' mutton in their mouths—dunno nothin'. Field-work is sickly-like, 'cos o' the wind and weather; and when yer comes to trampin' six mile out, and six in, and ditchin' and ploughin' all day i' tha wet, it stan' to reason as how tha rheumatic come hot and heavy arter a bit, wi' min and wimmin tew. Farmers, they kip theer greyhounds t' run for cups and that loike; and kill sheep for 'em 'gainst their coursin-meetens; but their min they dew starve mostly; and tha cupboard he's empty and the churchyard he's full. You see the lands is too small and min they're too many. That's wheer it be.'

'Gentry take up sa much o't wi' woods for shootin',' grumbled the miner in answer. 'If ye was ta till a' the grown' wheer's wood—'

'Nay, nay,' objected the Suffolker. 'That woan't dew. Woods is health to land; in field-work ye maun gie an' take, as wi' yer fellows. If ye doan't gie timber elbow-room, yer soil 'll be parchin' wi' dry loike a duck in a hay-loft. If ye fell yer wood ivery wheers tha land she'll gape wi' cracks, like a trollop's gound wi' holes—'

'Thin theer's nowt for't but t' immigrate?'

'To dew wot?'

'To gae beyant seas, to new countries.'

'Never heerd on 'em.'

'Lord sake! Why, my brither he's theer—in Australy—and he ses as how tha land's jest' bustin' like wi' plenty, an' ye can hae mutton for a farthin' a poun', an' ye can get a fat ewe for sixpence, and ye don't never see naebody chilled, nor clemmed, nor tatter'd.'

'Lawk-'a-mussy! Well—'t 'ud come cheaper to Parish to sind us all theer, I'm thinkin', than to kip so many on us all starvin' and rottin' at whoam?'

'They dew send a many.'

'Mebbe. Never heard o't in our parts. They s'uld come and spik about it; and shove us a bit and get us off right away: ye know we're rare and like the blow-flowers in pots. We'd stick in pots for iver, a'out blowin' nor neathin'; and jist gie up tha ghost along o' theer bein' no mould, and no room, and our roots a clingin', and a clingin', a'out nought to feed 'em. But pit plant in bigger pot—pot him out o' doors, whether he like 't or not—and he'll get strikin' agin, and blowin' like mad. He will; and so 'ud we. I'd loike to hear more o' these new lands?'

'I'll git Sue to read tha letter to ye if 'ee come o'er to my place,' rejoined the Peak miner. 'She read rare. She don't hev to spell out not more'n ivery ither word or so. Be 'ee long in these parts?'

'I kem 'scursion. First time I was iver out o' Suffeck. But my aunt she hev done well, a marryin' this Public; and I tho't I'd see her for onst. Ye're main and queer, wi' yer land all muddled like into these ups and downs. Ye must ha' rare big moles to throw up sich sky-high mouns?'

This was uttered with no sense of humour, but in a very grave spirit of wonder and of inquiry.

I did not catch the miner's reply, as the men moved within, no doubt to get fresh tobacco and more beer; and instead of their conversation I heard again the grave, grumbling tones of the husband and the more plaintive ones of the wife in the attic near me, whose lower voices had been drowned by the loud arguments of the East Anglian.

'Ben will ha' trouble i' that gell,' I heard the voice of the man say. 'She's off trapezin' about a'ready; crazed-like to gape at ta play-actors.'

'Well-a-day! that's ony nat'ral,' said the softer female voice, with the tender exclamation that has lingered in those parts since the days of your Shakespeare. 'Gells sud bide by hearth, I know that right well; but when they're young, and hanna na mother like, they gets dazed wi' lookin' i' tha glass, and hearin' tha lads crack o' theer gude looks. And for sure 'tis a bit dullish for Avice, all along o' hersilf i' tha quarry-wood, and she's just a bonny, feckless thing, wi' na mind in her.'

'She hev as good a home as ony jade can want,' growled the man; 'Ben's that douce tew her, and that fearfu' o' crossin' her, that she live, she dew, like a mouse i' a corn-bin. But theer it is—pit mice i' corn-bin, pit 'em i' a barn wheer theer's a score o' coombs i' sack, and a score o' coombs a' lyin' loose,—why, ye know, Jess, as I know, mice they'll niver go eat tha loose corn, they'll jist gnaw holes i' tha sackin', for sheer sake o' thievin' and reivin'.* And wimmen they's just like mice; giv' 'em their pleasure easy to come by, they'll nashen and fritten theirselves till they can run aside and gnaw the sackin' of some joy as God and men hev forbid to 'em. It's queer—it's awfu' queer. But m'appen tha A'mighty knew Himself what He med tha vermin and tha gells for—it's more nor we dew, I reckon.

And with that sorrowful reflection, sadly uttered, his voice ceased, and his heavy nailed boots clanged slowly

* I also have heard farmers say this of mice in a barn; but in justice to the maligned rodents I must say that I have had two mice in my rooms for the last six months, which, being well fed, never have touched food not given them, even when left alone for hours. The theft of all animals comes from hunger. I do not believe any of them care to steal for stealing's sake—except perhaps monkeys, to whom theft is charming because it is mischief.—ED.

down the wooden stairs. I never knew who it was that spoke, but I conclude it must have been some miner, or quarry cutter, or ploughman, who thus addressed his wife; in that utter oblivion that she must have been once a 'gell' herself, which seems a natural result of the bonds of marriage.

I was left alone all the day, evening and night; and whimpered and sobbed myself to sleep as best I could, with the big autumnal moon glowing through the little leaded lattice, and the shouts of the township's revelry coming faintly on the soft night wind.

It was dawn when Avice Dare returned: full dawn. Her face was deeply flushed; her hair dishevelled; her dress disordered; she laughed vacantly as she moved about, and she threw herself half undressed upon the bed, and slept soundly, without a single movement, several hours through, lying face downward with the air blowing in upon her.

I had once seen a man drunk at the quarry; it seemed to me that she laughed, and moved, and slept very much as he had done, under the potency of liquor.

Yet when at noon she awoke, and bathed herself in the cold, clear water, and shook out all her tresses, and dressed herself in a white bodice and a scarlet kirtle, she looked so charmingly, thanks to her youth, and her health, and her wonderfully perfect beauty, that I felt as if my suspicion was hateful and full of shame.

She stopped in her attiring once: and leaned her head on her hand; and stared at her face and form in the piece of mirror, which was much larger than her little bit of glass at home.

She seemed to survey herself quite mercilessly, with all her love for herself; and to be taking stock, as it were, of her capital of physical loveliness. The scarlet lips, the glowing brown eyes, the round white arms, the bosom that rose above the edge of the bodice that only rivalled it in whiteness; the tender tints and the soft curves of her limbs—she studied them all with a curious mingling of vain worship, and of mercantile foresight, fused in one.

Then she dressed herself in haste, clasping about her a quantity of fresh tawdry trinkets—new gifts, no doubt, from the fair—and turned her attention to me, whom she seized with a sharp and feverish force; as though I were

in some manner the talisman whereby she would summon the magic of Fortune.

It was a lovely morning; through the open window the autumn air blew strong and sweet; the sun shone; the rooks in the high trees cawed; the bells of the churches chimed merrily;—but Avice heeded none of these.

She consigned me afresh to my basket: and as this time I was permitted no peep-hole at all, I could only surmise that I was carried downstairs into the little dirty porch of the house. This porch, with oak settles fixed against it, was a favourite drinking-place of the miners, I believe; and more spiced ale, and toast, and mulled elder wine with crab apples bobbing in it, and possets of various kinds made with honey and milk, and cloves and apples, and all the old Elizabethan drinks that are still brewed in the North, were being eagerly called for, with the sweet circular wake-cake always in vogue on such occasions.

To all these, Avice, it seemed, rendered full justice; as the men kept crying to her, 'Well drained, my lass.' 'Take a sup o' this.' 'That's a good un to drink, aren't she?' 'Ye suld kip a public, my wench; ye're jist tha one for't.' But if she drank much she did not tell what was in her basket, and she went, at length, forth, decorously enough with the old woman Smedly, into the streets and the market-place.

For myself—I was too terrified to do anything, even to moan; and the close confinement of the basket made me feel very faint.

I suppose she met some one by appointment, for she stopped in a lonely by-street, and a man's voice addressed her—a small, thin, wiry voice, that I hated.

'Am I right, ma'am? I think I must be; Dick told me to look for the prettiest lady in all the town.'

Avice laughed; a laugh of pleasure, at the coarse stupid compliment.

'Are ye the genleman as wants a dog?' she said; 'leastways a pup?'

'I am, ma'am. I always want pups; I deal in 'em.'

'Well, thin—I hae brought 'ee un. Brither Ben he dunna know; he'll be mad like:—I'll hev to tell him as how I took ta pup wi' me, 'cause I feared as how Nell o' Moorside' ud forgit to gie it its meals, and i' the press o'

market-place I lost it. I sall hev to tell him some gammon like, surely,—for he's rare and fond o' ta pup—'

'Ah, I see! But you, ma'am, naturally do not like dogs about the house?'

'O, I dunna care for that. 'Tis a teasin' little wretch, for sure; but they dew say as how 'tis a deal o' valew, and I want tha gowd, as Dick tole ye, and so—'

'I see! Allow me—'

'Allow me,' meant opening my basket, and taking me out by the skin of my neck; a barbarous custom too prevalent.

They were standing, quite alone, under an archway that connected a malting-house and a meeting-chapel—a droll metaphor in stone, of the Church leaning on the World.

This part of the town was entirely deserted; the noise and merriment were but dimly heard; no one was near.

He examined me with the most minute and detestable attention, and looked very shrewd and avaricious as he did so. Finally he replaced me in the basket.

'Your price is high, ma'am: very high. I doubt if I shall ever see it back again. The pup is not of the value you suppose; nothing like it, still—as I promised Dick; and as you need the gold; and as the dog is certainly pretty, to say nothing of its mistress's beauty; I will purchase it for what you asked.'

'Three pun',' said Avice thirstily.

'Three pounds—including basket?'

'O, ye may have tha basket,' said Avice, with feverish haste. 'Hand o'er the gowd, theer's a good crittur!'

He counted three sovereigns slowly into her hand; it clutched and closed on them, and without even a word of thanks or farewell, she drew her skirts up about her, and flew off down the street like a lap-wing.

The man stood and gazed after her, bewildered at her sudden flight.

'She's a queer one,' he muttered. 'No good I fear, for all her handsome face. But the dog's worth twice his money, anyhow.'

With that he heaved up my basket, and bore me away to his lodgings.

I was his henceforward.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE MARKET-PLACE.

It is of no use now, to recount all the misery I suffered. I can recall it as though it were yesterday; and I cried my very heart out like a baby as I was. The man was not at the first unkind to me, though he struck me some few times sharply with a riding switch when I would not cease from my moaning and sobbing. He was rough too, and hurt me in handling, but he did not starve me. He chained me, indeed, by my light collar to the leg of a chair, and kept me prisoner in his little sitting-room upstairs that looked out on the market-place; but he was out a great deal, and I was left chiefly alone. I might be there but a day, I might be there for a week; I cannot recollect. I only know I was miserable. The first thing that recalled me to consciousness was the sharp sting of a whip across my back. I shrieked with the pain; in Ben's house even Avice had never dared to be at me. The only response to my cry was a sharper blow than the first; and this was repeated till I was literally blind and stupefied, and was quiet because numbed with anguish.

Then evil woke in me under my torments, and I bit and foamed, and flew like a mad thing—ah, how often your 'mad dog' is only a dog goaded by torture till he is beside himself, like a soldier delirious from shot-wounds!

The perfection of your scientific training is to make us either cravens or furies; what a fine result!

For this defence of myself I was thrust in a dark closet, and locked in there for the rest of the day and the night.

Over that time of misery I will pass; I hardly care even now to recall it.

With the next morning my new owner called me out, and gave me some bread-and-milk. He did not beat me this time; I believe he was afraid he might kill me, as I was very delicate, and thus he might never realise his lost three sovereigns.

After I had eaten this, he left me, chaining me again to the leg of a chair under the window, and locked the door of the little parlour upon me.

Once again alone, my grief was unrestrained; so much so that the woman of the house came and hammered at the door and swore at me for a 'dratted yelping beast,' which only made my cries the louder. As several hours went on, however, and my solitude remained unbroken, I cried myself so hoarse that I was unable to emit any sort of sound at last, and thought I might as well vary my imprisonment by looking out of the casement.

It was a deep old lattice-window, shut; but by jumping on the chair I could see perfectly down into the market-place, and, in spite of all my woe, I derived a certain amusement from watching the varied life and mirth that were to be seen below. There was one little pane open, too, for air; and as the window was low down, like the upper windows of all country dwellings, I both saw and heard with ease.

It was now fully past noon by the height of the sun, and the fun of the wakes was mounting high also—its perihelion of course was not till the dances and the 'play-actin'' of the night.

There were numerous tawny-coloured booths filled with cheap toys, and sweetmeats, and spar-ornaments, and wearing apparel, and all manner of tawdry little fineries. There were the roundabouts, in which men and women and children went gravely circling on wooden horses till they were giddy. There were all sorts of quacks, vending everything, from medicines that cured every disease in the pharmacopœia to knives with a hundred blades for twopence.

There were Cheap Jacks screeching themselves deaf over delf-plates from Staffordshire, and earthenware pans, and copper saucepans, and pewter pots, and shiny black kettles; all these valuable articles being literally given away, they averred, for a song. But when a lusty ploughman took one of them at their word, and carolling forth a stave of 'Gaffer Grey,' claimed one of the black kettles for his 'missus' as the recompense of his musical performance, the Cheap Jack loudly protested against such literal interpretation of his figurative language, and a very pretty bout with fisticuffs was the result, the innocent kettle ultimately being battered to pieces in the fray.

Such is men's justice; in all their quarrels there is always

some poor luckless kettle which, sinless itself, gets the blows from each side!

Besides all these amusements, there were itinerant musicians playing in and out of tune; there were wandering organ-boys with monkeys, who had strayed out of the cities with the ending of summer; there were red-cheeked country lasses, staring open-mouthed at all the wonders, and their sturdy lovers from mine and farm and quarry and marble-works, treating them to all these sights with broad jokes and uproarious laughter. And lastly, there was the crowning glory of the whole—the mimes outside the wooden theatre, who were strutting again to and fro, in all the spangle and silver lace, and cotton velvet, and pink calico, of their royal adornment. And over all the scene there arose one loud and continuous hum and rage of every noise ever heard under the sun—from braying trumpets, penny whistles, screaming infants, brawling men, shouting vendors, untuneful brass bands, and screeching women's shrill incessant laughter.

For the spiced ales, and the mulled wines, and the sweet possets, were driving a brisk sale; and even at this time of the day the larger half of the crowd, male and female, had already taken far more than was altogether good for it.

I looked everywhere in the tumult of the market-place for the scarlet ribbons of my cruel tyrant and traitress; but Avice was nowhere to be seen.

I recognised Isaac of the flour-mill—a tall, well-favoured, flaxen-headed fellow of twenty-two or so—but she was not with him. I thought he seemed wholly devoted to a pretty little brown modest-looking maiden, whom I thought I had once seen in the wood, and heard of as the blacksmith's sister. Was Avice inside the theatre, I wondered?—had she joined herself to the 'play-actors' in pursuit of the pedlar's counsel?

The afternoon sped fast, even in my captivity, with all this throng below me to watch, in its coming and going, its ebbing and flowing. The deep warm glow of the late day spread itself over earth and sky, making mellow the grays of the old stone buildings, and tingeing with a richer purple the line of the circling pine-clad hills.

Suddenly—near on sunset—I heard a voice that made my heart leap. It was asking,

'Hev ony o' ye seed my Avice?'

It was the voice of my dear old gentle Ben!

I stretched out as far as ever I could, but my head would not go through the tiny aperture alone left unclosed. I could see him standing almost under my casement, but he could not see me. I yelped, and barked, and screeched, in the longing to attract his attention; but my voice was feeble, and he never heard.

'Hev ony o' ye seed my wench?' he asked again. 'She's i' the town, I know, wi' tha owd woman Smedly.'

'I seed Avice somewheres about,' said one of the women rather hurriedly: the others were silent.

Ben looked very happy; he had a little rose in his bosom, and was dressed in his best fustian suit.

'I got ower work quick at ta Ashford Farms,' he said, with a ringing and cheerful voice to the woman who had spoken—a poultry-seller by trade, bright-eyed, and with a pleasant elderly face, an old friend of his, and of his mother's before him. 'I know'd tha little wench 'ud be here; and I kem ower to gie her a treat like. I've pit by a pund's wuth o' siller as she dunna guess aught about; and she can ha' what she likes wi' it—a gownd, or a shawl, or a lot o' fairins, or jist whativer she fancies. She telled me as how tha public tha dame was to tek her tew was called tha "Wheatsheaf;" but I canna find "Wheatsheaf" nohow.'

'Theer's no "Wheatsheaf" i' tha town nowheres,' said the poultry-woman, in a very low voice.

'Nowheres?' said Ben, astonished. 'For sure thin tha lass is so careless, she'll ha' forgat the right name. But, howe'er sall I find her if I dunna knaw tha public? I' such a throng as this'n, 'tis like lookin' for a needle i' a bottle o' hay. Ha' ony o' ye seed her? Ye sed ye had.'

'We seed her yisternight,' muttered a man in the group about him.

'Well! wheer was that, thin? Canna ye say?

'I' tha porch o' "Miner's Joy."'

'Ta "Miner's Joy"? Is't that the public? Wheer dew it stand? I'll go straight tew it. It'll git tew dusky for tha lass to see to git her fairins, and I hev to gae back wi' tha marn.'

The poultry dame laid her hand gently on his arm.

'Dinna gae to "Miner's Joy," Ben.'

'Why na?' he asked quickly. 'Why na?'

None of them spoke. He looked swiftly and fiercely from one to the other.

'What is't ye kip fra me?' he said, in a very low voice, while his fair, ruddy face grew white. 'Is tha little lass dead?'

'Na, na, Ben!' cried a score of voices. 'She's well enow —trust her tha minx. It's ony—'

'Ony what? And how dares ye to call her names?'

His mouth was set, his face white as death, his gray sad eyes flashed fire.

The old poultry-woman still kept firm, pitying hold on his arm.

'Dunna ye tak on, Ben. I'd na say a harsh word o' yer mither's child; but tha lass is no worthy o' a' that. She's a bad un!'

Ben flung off her hand with a fierce oath.

'If 'ee was ony a man as sed that! Wheer's my lass? Wheer's Avice? I'll hev tha truth out o' ye, sin I wring a' yer throttles for it!'

They were frightened at his gesture and his tone: they called out as with one voice:

'She sold ta pup tew days agone, Ben; and she's gaed wi' tha gowd she got to Lunnon town; and she's telled tha play-actors she's meanin' to be one o' them i' that great city; and ye suldna tak on so; for everybody knowed 'cept yoursell that she's been a gay un iver sin she cud cock her eye at a man. Theer stan' Isaac o' tha corn-mill as was her sweetheart this summer-time through;—ax him—he'll tell ye what a light-o'-love she was; and wi' more'n na him for sure if 'ee ony know'd all.'

Ben stood still and rigid, with his face like a dead man's, and his teeth clenched on his lower lip till the blood gushed from it.

Isaac was loitering near.

He flashed his gray eyes over the youth.

'Isaac Cliffe, be this'n tha truth?' he said slowly.

Isaac grinned—a half-sheepish—a half-victorious laugh.

''Tis trew,' he muttered. 'And I'd ha' wed her, and med a honest woman o' her, I would, Ben;—ony ye sees she was bad, core through.'

The words were scarcely uttered ere Ben had sprung on him and seized him, and flung him up in the air. The lad was strong, and a famous wrestler; he struggled, and fought,

and dealt back blow for blow; but he had no force against the violence of passion and of agony.

The people shrieked aloud that they were killing one another, and tried to tear them asunder, and threw themselves on the wrestling arms and heaving forms; and at length by sheer conquest of numbers dragged Ben away off his prey, and held him motionless amongst them, while others who had come to the rescue, hurried the youth, swooning, and bruised, and bleeding from every limb, into the shelter of the nearest ale-house in the market-square.

All the hearts of the dense throng were with the dishonoured and forsaken man; they closed around him and craved his pardon, and cried out rough tender words of sympathy and sorrow; while the women, with tears coursing down their cheeks, left booth, and mart, and show, and came about him and sought to comfort him.

'Dinna tak' on so,' they murmured, 'sure tha wench is no wurth it. An' she ha' gone to play-actin' and sin; and ye'll see her na more i' this life; and we knows as ye ha' done a' yer duty by her; and wimmin ha' got the deil in 'em sometimes; and theer's na man strong enow to cope wi' the deil an' a wench together. Dinna ye tak' on so; ye've amaist killed the poor lad, as was na so much to blame whin a's been said.'

But he heard no word that they spoke. He stood upright, rigid as a stone; gazing straight before him like a bull wounded unto death, but with the power to slay still in him. Then he threw his arms above his head with one loud cry:

'Tha little lass!—tha little lass!'

And fell forward like one dead; his face striking the stones of the street.

The people closed around him as mourners close round a grave.

They hid him from my sight: I knew no more.

CHAPTER IX.

JACOBS' CHURCH.

I CAN but dimly recall the nights and days of misery that followed on my betrayal by Avice Dare.

They are all in a blurred mass of blows, and oaths, and dark closets, and starvation, and brutal teaching of antics

that were styled pretty tricks, and nothing stands out clearly to me save the one remembrance of how utterly wretched I was.

I think nothing in the world is so intensely unhappy as an unhappy dog. We are of such vivid natures, of such lively imaginations, of such constant affection; and as we can never tell our woes, but are almost sure to receive a cuff or a kick if we only murmur at our weary lot, we are beyond all other creatures miserable.

I wonder now that I did not die;—but if everything died that is full of wretchedness, your world would soon have but a sparse peopling.

If the brutal treatment my purchaser looked on as 'training,' had long endured, I dare say my young and tender frame would have given way beneath it; my spirit certainly would have been broken. Happily for my safety he soon received an offer of a few guineas for me, in a month's time from his purchase of me, which he immediately accepted. This offer transferred me to a new home, in which, at least, I found peace and repose, although these were accompanied by a rider which too often goes with them—*i.e.*, dulness.

It was in a dower-house, amidst the flatness and unloveliness of that 'fen country,' whither the man who had bought me of Avice had taken me when he had sped by night out of the little Derbyshire town, fearful no doubt of Ben's vengeance if he should be discovered. Here I became the property of an old and rich woman, who was the owner of this melancholy though peaceful hermitage.

She was good to me in a general way, though often precise and severe, and I suffered but little whilst with her. But there was nothing there to call my affections into play, and nothing that was of sufficient interest to mark out those years in my remembrance; nothing that could make me forget the loss of my dear friends, Ben and Trust.

No doubt this period was beneficial to me, for they were two years in which I was well fed, well cared for, and taught all those gracious and highly-bred manners which have ever since always distinguished me. They were good years for me, morally and physically, I am well aware; but they were dull ones, nevertheless, and bear to my mind all the haziness and dreariness that your earliest school days commonly wear to yours. They were quite uneventful, as life in the house of an aged, wealthy, and eccentric recluse usually is;

and beyond the hours I spent in the trim, high-walled, damp gardens, or in the big, yellow carriage, like a state cabin on wheels, I had absolutely no diversion except listening to the interminable readings with which my old mistress had her hours occupied.

She had been a woman of the world, in her time, I believe, though I know not what trouble had made her now a solitary in her dull jointure-house; and she was very liberal in her range of literature. All languages being equally intelligible to us (though we can never comprehend why you have not all one and the same, as we superior animals have), I derived considerable entertainment from hearing the innumerable works, in various tongues, which her companion read aloud to her almost from morning to night.

To my thinking, it seems as dreary work for any person close on her grave to stuff her brains with new knowledge, as for an artist to elaborately fashion a piece of pottery that he knows will be broken on the morrow; but she appeared not to feel it so. Besides she was very fond of French memoirs, and of all sorts of fiction, on the principle, I fancy, on which an actress, no longer upon the stage, likes to read over the old comedies that she once played in, when flowers were showered at her feet, and all the gay gladness of triumph was around her.

And thus my own mind, as I listened week after week, month after month, to these continuous and versatile readings, became stored with a vast and varied human knowledge. The depth and width of it will, no doubt, astonish you as you peruse my autobiography, though I endeavour to suppress all evidence of my scholarship as much as I can, since I am aware that to ask one's reader, or one's spectator, to think, is the direst offence that either author or actor can ever commit.

Perhaps also, if you find any touch of egotism, as of vanity, in these pages, you will kindly remember that in these early days of my education I heard a great number of religious autobiographies. It is remotely possible that their influence may still colour my style; though I had excellent counter-infusions of all kinds, ranging from Martial to Mantespan, and trust that the latter sway is the stronger.

No doubt these two years were salutary for me, in body, and in mind; and the wondrous tales that I heard read, filled me with all the rash, eager, longing of youth for a

closer sight of this marvellous great world. Alas! it came in a manner I had little looked for: I chanced one day to accidentally break a very fine Vernis Martin vase, of which my old mistress was extravagantly fond; and as I had been often before denounced as a mischievous, tiresome, frivolous little creature, because my animal spirits and childish joyousness would ill-tone down to the gray monotone of an aged invalid's desires, I was forthwith sentenced to exile. A green and red parrot—as monosyllabic a creature as a mechanical toy, and as greedy as a Director, or the Liquidator that invariably comes after him—was purchased in my stead; and I was consigned to the butler, to be sold wherever, and for whatever, he chose.

I need not say that in this place I had never ceased to passionately regret my dear old master in the noble pine woods of the Peak. Indeed, I had sometimes lamented for him aloud in a grief that brought on me angry words, and even angry strokes; so little sympathy have men or women ever with *our* woes, although for theirs we feel so keenly, and fret ourselves so ceaselessly. Twenty times at least had I endeavoured to run away, with the full intent of trying to find my road back alone to the well-beloved little cottage under the rose-thorn. But I had been always thwarted, overtaken, and punished for what they called 'straying,' though it was but the simplest and most natural exercise of fidelity.

My anxiety, therefore, was tenfold increased at the prospect of a new removal, which seemed to consign me still farther from him, and might plunge me into still greater wretchedness. Yet, like all youth, hope mingled with my fear, and I vaguely trusted that if the coming change did not take me back to my first beloved home, it would, perchance, lead to some brighter, gladder, more sympathetic existence than that which I had spent in the old, dull, moated dower-house amongst the marshes. My little brain was teeming with a myriad of visions—dogs have very vivid fancies, as you may tell by the excitement of our dreams. I scarcely knew whether I hoped most, or dreaded most, from the new adventures into which I should be cast, when, sold to a metropolitan dealer, the butler bore me forth, for the last time, from the gloomy gates of the place where, if I had not known joy, I had at least been safe, and well, and innocent.

It was midwinter.

The fens were half-covered with ice. The water-fowls were dying of cold and of starvation by the thousands. The bitter winds were rushing in from the northern ocean across all those desolate marshlands and reedy still lagoons. Farther towards the east the sea was rushing over the dykes and piers, and the salt water was flooding coppice and meadow, killing the river fish, and drowning the river birds, till fisher and farmer were dumb with despair.

It was a very cold, cheerless season. It was a very long and terribly weary journey in such weather up to the Great City: a journey on which I verily think I should have died, had it not been for the goodness of the railway-guard, who took me with him in his van, and wrapped me in a bit of rug.

We arrived late at night, and there was no one to meet me at the station. The guard was off duty till the next morning came round; he pitied me, and tucked me under his arm, and carried me away.

'I'll take you round myself,' he said to me, looking at the parchment label on my collar. I like men who speak to me as to a creature of reason and of feeling. 'You're going to a rare rum bad lot, you are.'

The din, the tumult, the gas-glare, the wild uproar of the London streets drove me almost mad with fright; and, but for the strong detaining hand of my guard, I should have flung myself under the wheels in sheer terror and been crushed to atoms.

O, how could people live and breathe and endure existence in such holes as this, I wondered! Hundreds of small houses crowding on one another; story on story mounting to the murky smoke-veiled heaven; the stench of candle and soap and bone-boiling and manure factories, steaming over all the place; the only light the flare of the yellow gas, through the leaden fog, on faces haggard with misery, hideous with debauch, vile with crime, or death-like with starvation! My very blood curdled in me as I saw and heard, and turned blind and sick with the fetid odours of this Gehenna.

Once I had heard my dear friend Ben talk to the workmen at the quarry of the cities and their foulness.

'I went to Lunnun once, Tam,' he said, 'you'll mind the time; I was a fule, and the 'scursion he was so cheap-like; I was tempted. Well, I'm glad I went. I niver know'd till I did how much I had ta thank God for i' bein' country-

born and bred. They're stifled, Tam—just stifled. Th' air's all smoke and reek; an' the winds is all pison; and whin ye look up'ards there's a great black hand like a divil's wing a' stretchin' far o'er atween ye and tha sun. There bean't a mossel of grass as *is* grass; there bean't a leaf as don't look sick and swounded; there bean't a bird as dew sing; not a child as dew laugh; the birds fight and the childer screech. They're all jammed togither, like turf-sods when ye pack 'em close; theer's allus a horrible noise i'their ears; and a horrible stench i' their nostrils. Now how should un grow up decent, and God fearin' like, whin they niver see the blue sky, nor smell a flower as blows, nor feels tha sou'-wester sweep agin their faces? Ta Passon he talk a deal of divils and sich like: weel!—if theer be 'em anywheres, for sure it was they as fust drew min into cities, that they might forgit their God i' tha stenching drouth, and be ready to be swept i' ta hell, all o' one muck an' one heap!'

I remembered Ben's words when I also entered that abomination of desolation—the eastern half of the City of Labour.

In the little cottage in the pine-wood, even in the dreariness of winter and under the drag of poverty, there had been beauty—beauty in the white, smooth, glittering snow; in the branches all silvered with the hoar-frost; in the leaping flame on the hearth that played on the lattice panes; in the beautiful clear steely skies with the northerly stars burning through them.

But here!—I shuddered as I saw the gray, dust-strewn, mouldy tenements; the tawdry frightfulness of the few attempts at ornament, the ghastly tumult of the choked street—choked with thieves and beggars, and tally-men, and ballad-sellers, and prostitutes, and costermongers, and wretched horses starving in the last years of age, and ghoul-like children quarrelling with the poor stray dogs for offal. Poverty is bitter in the country; but it is heaven beside hell compared with poverty in the city.

The way seemed to me interminable through these most hideous streets. Where the guard stopped was before a little low row of filthy crowded houses, all alike, and all hemmed in on one another, with gas flaring about on either side, and stalls of horrible-scented fish, of coffee, and of oranges, standing down the narrow way with little oil-lamps

flaring above them under shades, and miserable children gathering round.

My protector knocked at one of the low-doors.

'Bill Jacobs?' he asked.

'Bill Jacobs, yer are,' growled a beer-thickened voice as the door unclosed.

A hand clutched me savagely by my throat.

'O-ah! this 'ere little beast!' he muttered. 'Anythin' to pay?'

'Nothin' to pay,' answered the guard. ''Tis a pretty critter you've got there. I wouldn't mind standin' ten bob for him.'

The other man, still holding me by the neck, growled out a sardonic laughter.

'I dessay yer wouldn't. Ten sovs, my lad, or nothin.'

And with that he slammed the door in the guard's face; and I felt, with a fearful sinking of the heart, that my only chance was gone for ever.

This new home of mine was in a hideous little house, and consisted of only one room, with the cellar immediately below.

The room was black with dirt and smoke; there were two cupboards in it, one occupied by two badgers, the other by two small dogs. The cellar beneath appeared full of dogs, to judge by the howling and moaning that proceeded from it. There was a miserable bed in the chamber; a rickety table; a few cages filled with miserable choking throstles and larks, half dead with stench and captivity; and there was beyond, seen through a little window in the back wall, a yard of which I knew the purpose ere I had been many hours there.

Such was the abode of Bill Jacobs and his wife; the latter a wan, gentle, broken-spirited creature, whom he kept black and blue with bruises, and who sought, I found, to do all the little she was able to mitigate for us the horrors of this Black Hole.

The first thing that Bill Jacobs did with me was to fling me at the woman with a curse; the next was to turn all smile to two youths who were waiting his advent. They were slender gentleman-like boys, about seventeen, and, as I imagine now, must have been public school lads. They had come for some pleasant pastime, it seemed by their looks and words; it proved to be the baiting of a badger.

I will not sicken my readers with the narrative. They probably know all the details of how the poor, brave, stout-hearted animal holds his own against the terrible odds, till, foe on foe being sent against him, the agony of his wounds and the loss of his blood cow even his fearless spirit, and he submits to be dragged forth, a mass of torn fur and ragged flesh, helpless, blind, and shivering.

In this instance the sport was doubly horrible, because neither badger nor bull-dogs had any heart or zest for the fight; they both shrank back, and had to be scourged and pricked and dragged to the encounter; and when it was all over, the limping, bleeding dogs were kicked back to their cellars, and the badger was thrown in his hole to recover from his injuries, only to again go through the same ordeal of torture.

And the slender-limbed boys, with their pleasant voices, were charmed, and left two sovereigns with the exhibitor of the spectacle, and went out in glee and gaiety, having enjoyed a favourite sport of Young England.

It made me very ill and sick at heart; it was the first bloodshed I had ever seen, and the sight had been very hideous to me, and had made me shudder greatly.

How could I tell myself that I might not be torn in pieces next?

It seemed hell itself, this place to which they had consigned me.

The man's horrible curses; the howls of the dogs in the cellar; the wailing of the puppies in cages; the sight of the blood and the torture; the shrieks of the animal that he kicked or beat, or forced into some wretched hole too small for it to turn in; the sad filmy eyes of the poor birds sitting moping with their feathers all in disarray; the piteous terrors of the woman every time her husband's savage glance lit on her, as though with every look she feared a blow: all this was more dreadful to me than I can ever describe.

Almost all day long I was shut up in a cage lest I should roam away—a cage of wire about a foot square, in which my limbs became so cramped, and my sight so stupefied from being set away on a dark shelf, that I almost ceased to keep any account of the passage of the days, and hardly knew when night fell and dawn began.

Now and then, by urging that such confinement would be my death, his wife Jenny got permission from him to let me run loose a little in the yard; but even then I was so terrified lest evil should happen to me, that I hardly dared to go from underneath the folds of her cotton gown.

I was sorry for her too; she had such an utterly wretched, colourless, woe-begone life, that it seemed frightful that any one of God's creatures ever should be condemned to live such.

She never stirred out; she was the butt and scapegoat of her brutal husband, and she had nothing to do from morning until evening, save to dress the wounds of the torn and baited creatures, and revive enough vitality in them to enable them to go forth again to meet the torture.

She was a tender-hearted woman too, which made her lot an agony scarce less than that of the martyred beasts. I have known her stretch her arm between a dog and her husband's whip, though the cruel lash cut into her flesh like a knife; and I have seen her seize his hand, and scream for pity, when he was thrusting a red-hot needle into a canary's eye to blind it (on the fancy that it sang better in blindness), though with the next moment his huge fist surely levelled her with the boards.

I daresay many such problems have puzzled bigger heads than mine; but I have often marvelled whatever compensation could ever be found or given for that long, unrewarded, stricken life, which was spent unseen of men, subject to the brutalities of a drunkard, and racked by the witness of cruelties that it was absolutely powerless to prevent?

An old dog, Punch by name, who had been there many years (and to whom this tyrant was alone not cruel, because he had once seen Punch strangle a man that strove to beat him), told me that in a bygone time she had had a little child, and that, though the child had only lived two years, it had lived long enough for its blue eyes to grow pale and dilated with fear at its father's steps—long enough for its mother to say that she thanked God when she laid it down at rest within its little quiet grave.

This ruffian was indeed one of the greatest brutes that the world ever held.

Dog-fancier was in his case, as in most others, a delicate

synonym for dog-stealer; and the society that met in his den was composed of some of the very worst blackguards in London. These men smoked and drank; and swore and gambled, in the lowest and coarsest fashion that they could; and were especially hilarious when one of them had brought in a valuable animal, for whom its master would be certain to offer fabulous rewards, or a priceless little pet dog, that could be slipped in a pocket and carried out of the country before its owner had scarcely discovered its loss.

The big dogs they drugged, lest their bark might be heard and recognised, until such time as a reward high enough to satisfy their own cupidity was advertised; when they would put on a clean shirt and a virtuous face, and take the captive home, with many declarations of their own tenderness towards him, when they had found him astray 'right away by Barnes Bridge, sir—'alf starved—as I'm livin' man.' Which fable, if the dog had a mistress and not a master, usually brought about an extra sovereign to the good Samaritan.

The small ones they generally sent on to the Continent; and one little fellow, only four years old, told me he had been stolen fourteen times by Bill Jacobs' emissaries, on each of which occasions they had never sold him for less than twenty guineas, sometimes for more, and always in different cities of Europe.

He was called 'Cosmo,' 'short for cosmopolitan,' he explained to me. 'You know that means a citizen of the world—one who has seen many countries and many minds. But myself—I hate the title. It means, as far as my experience goes, that you have a smattering of everything, and a knowledge of nothing; a bill at every inn, and a home in no country; everybody claims you, and you can claim nobody; your standing point is on a see-saw, and you are a tennis-ball for all rackets.'

And he was certainly extravagantly bitter on the subject of his cosmopolitanism. To have been sold and bought a dozen times always sours a dog; though I have known men who have been sold and bought a hundred times, who have only got very fat and very comfortable in the process of exchange.

But, then, you see the men pocket the money; and the dogs don't.

Anything more utterly degraded, wretched, and desolate

than I was at this prison of Bill Jacobs', I could not suppose ever had the unhappiness to exist. If it had not been for Jenny Jacobs, I should not have lived a week.

She did all she could to better my condition, and to comfort me in my misery, and whilst I was with her she in a measure succeeded. But she used to be sent out by her husband 'charing,' and was half the day away; and in her absence I was consigned to the cellars, where all the hapless animals which Jacobs had stolen, or purchased cheaply, were immured with scarce any light, foul water, clanking chains, and the scantiest food that would suffice to keep breath in their bodies.

You think you have no slaves in England! Why, half the races in creation moan, and strive, and suffer, daily and hourly, under your merciless tyrannies! No slaves! Ask the ox, with his blood-shot agonised eyes, mutilated for the drovers' gain ere he is driven to his end in the slaughter-house. Ask the sheep, with their timid woe-begone faces, scourged into the place of their doom, bruised and bleeding and tortured. Ask the racer, spent ere he reaches his prime, by unnatural strains on strength and speed, that he may fill the pockets of your biggest blackguards with misbegotten gold; old whilst yet he is young, poisoned in the hours of his victory, caressed by princes in the moment that he ministers to their greed, cast off to street hire and hourly misery in the worthless years of his weary age. Ask the cart-horse, doomed, through a long life of labour, to strive and stagger under burdens, to bear heat and cold, and hunger, and stripes, without resistance; fed grudgingly, paid for willing toil by merciless blows, killed by doing the work of men as the Egyptian slave died in the lifting of the last stone to the King's Temple, or consigned, as the only recompense for years of usefulness and patience, to the brutalities of the dissecting-room or of the knacker's yard. Ask *us!*

What! You tell me this is but the issue of an inevitable law? Ay, so it is; of the law of the stronger over the weaker. But whilst you thus follow out that law on millions of chained and beaten and tortured creatures, have conscience enough, I pray you, not to brag aloud that you keep no slaves, not to bawl from the housetops of your reverence for freedom

When will you give a Ten Hours' Bill for horses—a Prohibitive Act against the racing of one and two-year-olds?—a Protection Order for cattle?—and an Emancipation Movement for chained dogs? Nay—when will you do so much as remember that the coward who tortures an animal would murder a human being if he were not afraid of the gallows? When will you see that to teach the hand of a child to stretch out and smother the butterfly, is to teach that hand, when a man's, to steal out and strangle an enemy?

The time passed, as I have said, very monotonously, very miserably, the chief part spent in the cage upon the shelf, or in the cellar I have named. I believe that Jacobs failed in his efforts to get a purchaser for me; for sometimes he would wash me and comb me, and carry me forth, through many streets and past grand white mansions, and into green carriage-crowded parks. He would offer me now to one, now to another of people passing by; and when we reached home again he would curse me and pinch my flesh and forbid his wife to give me any supper, alleging that I ate my head off—as indeed I almost could have done, so devoured with hunger was I oftentimes.

The only day that Bill Jacobs was at all in decently human temper was upon the Sundays of each week.

At this lodging of his there was a back-yard; and in the back-yard was a rat-pit. On Sunday mornings there used to be grand spectacles of rat slaughter. And there were numbers of young men—very gentleman-like men, some of them—who would pay half-a-guinea for admission, and a seat to see the rats being killed, and the rat-dogs torn and worried in the conflict; and the prices ranged as high as a sovereign a seat when, in addition to its ennobling sport, there was one of the badgers brought out from the cupboard to be drawn.

'Jacobs' Church' was a byword amongst a certain sporting community; and I have seen men whom I subsequently saw in the House of Commons, and at the celebrated Clubs, come thither on a Sunday morn after a late breakfast, to assist at the precious spectacle of dogs and rats fighting, tearing, and slaughtering one another, till the pit was red with blood.

What did the police do?

O, nothing. Jacobs paid them well to be quiet. They took up an old man for selling periwinkles during divine service, and they locked up a little beggar child for sitting sobbing on a door-sill, both just outside Bill's house; but they knew better than to come to lords and gentlemen, and members of parliament, and disturb the Sabbath circle round the rat-pit.

Most of our race, kept here thus, of course were beagles, rat-catchers, bull terriers, and the like; and by the way, how sharp, how hard, how full of concentrated cunning and ferocity combined, become the countenances of your rat-catching dogs! They are exactly like the faces of your men on the turf: of a surety debasing pursuits mould the features as the hand of the sculptor moulds the mask from clay; or else why should your bull-dog, who is for ever drawing badgers or chevying vermin, get that look for all the world like that on the face of your prize-fighters? And why should your young lordling, who spends all his patrimony on 'yearlings', and all his time on the 'flat,' approximate so closely in tone and aspect and countenance to the bookmakers, and blacklegs, and trainers, and jockeys, who between them contrive to rob and to ruin him?

It is needless to say that I was very frightened and miserable in such society. They made dreadful mockery of me and my white silky curls; and they were perpetually fighting and swearing amongst one another. Their conduct was fearful; their language I happily did not comprehend.

There was one old bull-dog, who looked the most savage yet the most honest of them all, who protected me from their violence, and was, in his own hard rough way, kind to me.

He was by name Tussler, and was, I found, the hero of a hundred fights. He deigned to talk to me a good deal, and tried to enlighten my ignorance; but I did not understand much that he said: I only felt that life seemed, by his showing, a constant rough-and-tumble affray in which the weakest always went to the wall.

Tussler told me he had belonged to a bruiser who had but recently departed from the scene of his earthly combat.

'They made me chief mourner with a bit of crape on,' he continued. 'I don't know why they thought crape necessary, for I was really very sorry that he died. The world thought Jemmy Brown—he was called the Game-Cock always: you must have heard of him? Never!—damn it, where have you lived?

'Well, the world always thought that the Cock was a brutal bloodthirsty fellow. You know he had a very neat way of pounding his man's face into a jelly; and when he got him doubled up at the ropes he always went into him—awful. He killed Old Swipes that way—an Irish bruiser Swipes was, and only twenty when the Cock smashed him as dead as a door-nail—but it was only in the way of business. It was a job, and he liked to go through with it.

'Outside the Ring Jemmy was the best-natured creature going. When a badger half-murdered me, the Cock nursed me like a woman. And there never was a man that stuck as the Cock did to a friend. There was one in particular he was fond of—one he'd been with at school as a child, and one he had never lost sight of; a poor devil that never came to any good because he was such a soft-hearted thing, and ended at last as a super—a man you know that goes on the stage to carry a flag, or a torch, or a sword, and say nothing.

'Well, one day Jemmy was engaged for a private match in a gentleman's rooms at Oxford; and if he failed to be there punctually, he'd agreed to pay the bruiser whom he was to meet forfeit stakes of twenty-five pounds;—and you must know that the money was a deal to the Cock, for he lived fast and was often out at elbows. Just as he was starting for the fight there came a letter by morning mail: it was only a line or two scrawled by this super, to say he had been taken bad in his lungs as he was acting as standard-bearer down in Cornwall, and the doctors had told him he'd die; and he begged to see Jemmy before he went to his grave.

'What did the Cock do?—never paused a second, just tossed the forfeit stakes to his friend, and started that minute for Penzance. The poor super died an hour after Jemmy got there; but he begged of the Cock to take care of his son, a little un with no mother, and a pretty puny five-year-older.

'The Cock took that lad, and he sent him to a good school; and he laid him up in lavender, as it were, and never let him hear a harsh word. He never let him see the Ring, because he thought as the dead wouldn't like it; but he had him trained up for a glass-stainer, and the boy is at it now: very quick at his art, and quite steady. Now I call the Cock a good man—what do you say? And yet the world called him a precious villain; and they were very near swinging him on a gallows when he pummelled the breath out of Swipes.'

I could say nothing: all moral and mental perception were too utterly confused in me with this combination of virtue and murder.

'There's a deal of goodness that the world never sees,' said Tussler in conclusion, 'as there's a deal of viciousness it never guesses. Now, myself, I love worrying rats, and cats, and badgers—I am never so happy as when I lay a dozen dead all round me—but I should scorn to hurt a lame dog, I wouldn't kill a cat that fought for her kittens, and I would have let the Cock beat me to death if he'd wished just because he was my master and I cared for him.'

I ventured to hint that, with so much natural goodness of character, it might be as well to be merciful even to rats and to badgers.

'O, damn it, no!' he replied with considerable acerbity. 'They are one's foes by nature. A badger would kill me if I didn't kill him. I choose as men choose,—I just nip his neck. Don't get preachee-preachee! Did you ever hear of a rum lot called Quakers across the Atlantic that were always prating of peace?—well, my dear, they burnt everybody that didn't agree with them. That is what the peacemakers always do.'

I was silent out of deference: conscious that he could nip me in the neck if I differed.

Much the same motive lies at the bottom of most of the reverence that this age sees rendered to kings and queens, creeds and codes.

Such conversations as this did not make me less miserable, less terrified, at the prospect of this world into which I was plunged; or less regretful of that happy, innocent, playful life that I had led in the little cottage under the pines.

Old Trust would have felt every hair on his head stand

on end at the enormities I heard and witnessed; and that humane creature, who had sorrowed over a frozen lamb, would have howled in disgust at the conversation of this sporting community,—conversation exclusively of the numbers slaughtered, and of the prowess of the slaughterers.

Subsequently, I have often been present at hot luncheons in manorial woods after battue-shooting, and once also at an Imperial hunt in the forest of Compiègne; and the talk at both has borne the closest possible resemblance to that heard in the bull-dogs' cellar at Bill Jacobs'. But I did not know this then; and I was only immeasurably frightened and horror-stricken.

CHAPTER X.

HE IS LAUNCHED ON LIFE.

I REMAINED some little time at this wretched place; the only things that solaced me being the poor woman's great care, and the rough kindness of Tussler, whose conduct was far better than his language, which, I must say, was awful. The winter was merging into spring, and I had been there about three months, when Tussler was sold to a sporting baronet, and I became aware that some change was about to take place in my own affairs.

I had been washed, combed, made smart, and dressed in a little scarlet jacket that Jacobs, in his good humour, was wont to aver made me look just like an Ascot post-boy; I still wore the little bit of a white metal chain collar, graven with my name, which had been forged for poor Ben by the burly smith at the forest-forge in the pine-woods, who, though his chief labour lay in shoeing the huge cart-horses, yet had shown so light and facile a touch at little pieces of metal work, that could pleasure a maiden in her fancy, or a child at his play.

When I was thus dressed, Jacobs bore me out with him; he chuckled, and seemed content; I was thrust into a small dark wicker den, that was tied down over my head; and I knew no more. 'Hold yer jaw, yer beast,' he said once with a shake of my cage, 'what are yer yelping at?'

I was yelping because, as he carried me into the street, and I thrust my head a little forth from my basket, in the damp, chill March morning, a girl went by us with a basket full of little penny-bunches of country-born violets, blue and white; and the sweet familiar fragrance of them brought back to me, so vividly, the clusters that purpled all the moss-grown ground under the trees of my lost but unforgotten home.

When your dog, lying near you, gives a sudden cry, as though of pain, you kick him;—ah! my good sirs, is it only because he is troubled with too much memory; a disease which you, who are of the world, worldly, you who forget with such pleasant ease all disagreeable trifles, from your marriage vows to your unlimited liabilities, are little likely to catch from him by contagion.

Bill Jacobs carried me swiftly through his own hideous quarter of the town towards open squares and spacious streets, and masses of what looked to me like palaces;—and palaces they were, as I knew later on, castles of Indolence wherein the Kings of Clubs reigned supreme.

He turned up one of the by-streets leading out of the chief of these great thoroughfares; and after some little delay was admitted into a building bearing the inscription of 'chambers,' and passed up the staircase to a room on the second floor of this, to me, mysterious domicile.

It was a very pretty little room, all rose-hued and gilded, and bright with gay chintz, and with manifold ornaments, not in the very best taste. I thought it must be the apartment of some fair feminine thing; but there was no one in it, save a man of about thirty years; small, handsome, and bearing about him somewhat the air of that class which I have later on heard characterised as the 'would-be swells' of society.

He was exquisitely attired in a morning dress of mulberry velvet! and had coffee and brandy beside him on the daintiest of inlaid stands; and he was glancing through a yellow-covered novel, which he slashed idly with a pretty paper-knife, as he looked up and spoke.

'Brought the beast, Jacobs? Let's have a look at him.'

'A perfect animal for a lady—quite perfect, sir,' my owner responded, handing me over as roughly as though I were a bit of wood, for inspection. 'You want him for a Russian princess, sir, I believe you said?'

The young man nodded assent; and asked if I should stand the climate, to which of course Bill Jacobs gave an unqualified affirmative; and the next fifteen minutes were employed in one of those minute and merciless analyses of me, which dogs hear made in their presence, and human beings only behold in their critics' newspaper articles.

But it comes to very much the same thing with both—and whether it be a dog-fancier inspecting a terrier, a dog-buyer staring at a mastiff, a leader-writer dissecting a statesman not of his party, or a reviewer passing judgment on a poet not of his clique, the whole quartette equally ignore all the excellences that stare them in the face, and only dwell on the one fault they can find in breeding or training,—in strain or in style.

The moments seemed centuries to me, nor was I in the least reassured at the prospect of being bought for a woman. Little Cosmo, at Jacobs', had told me, that parasol handles could rap fearfully hard, and small, high-heeled embroidered boots kick with exceeding asperity and severity.

Ah! you people never guess the infinite woe we dogs suffer in new homes, under strange tyrannies; you never heed how we shrink from unfamiliar hands, and shudder at unfamiliar voices, how lonely we feel in unknown places, how acutely we dread harshness, novelty, and scornful treatment. Dogs die oftentimes of severance from their masters; there is Grey Friar's Bobby now in Edinboro' town who never has been persuaded to leave his dead owner's grave all these many years through. You see such things, but you are indifferent to them. 'It is only a dog,' you say 'what matter if the brute fret to death?'

You don't understand it of course; you who so soon forget all your own dead, the mother that bore you, the mistress that loved you, the friend that fought with you shoulder to shoulder; and of course, also, you care nothing for the measureless blind pains, the mute helpless sorrows, the vague lonely terrors, that ache in our little dumb hearts

I am a dog of the world now,—O yes,—just as your best men are men of the world. But I think to most of us cynics the world is only a shield of bronze,—held before us to hide the breast-wound. What do you say?—the sentiment is not new I am well aware; but it is emphatically the truth.

I have seen so many of these shields, so brilliant and

polished and proven, which rang so hard and so keen, repelling the sharpest spearheads; but the hearts that beat under them throbbed—throbbed in pain till they were quiet in death. If you have not,—where have you lived?

Well,—my barter this morning in the little rose-coloured room was soon effected, and the purchaser paid for me in four crisp five-pound notes, Jacobs of course protesting that I was worth quite treble the amount.

I was thankful when he was gone; no fate could be worse than the durance I had undergone in his cellars.

The young man soon after passed into his bed-chamber adjoining; and I was left alone with a very big dog whom I had noticed asleep in the window.

He reared himself up, and surveyed me; I liked his look; he was a kingly creature, called indeed King Arthur, and I thought he would fight my battles for me whilst I was there.

I am brave enough in my way; but I have necessarily far more mind than matter; and a little Maltese dog can no more find courage of use against a hound's fangs or a brute's boot, than your chivalrous soldier, with all the blood of the cavaliers in him, can find his avail him aught against your dainty, devilish, thirty-inch shell, with its pretty steel dominoes of slaughter.

He stared at me, and growled a little;

'Humph! so you are for *her!*'

'The Russian Princess?' I asked timidly; feeling that he growled at her, and not at me.

'The Russian Princess!' he echoed. 'Fiddlesticks!'

'Shall I stay here, then?' I inquired.

'No, I know who you are bought for;—but I don't want to say. I have lived long enough to learn discretion.'

I found King Arthur, when I knew him better, the frankest, blindest, most easily cheated creature in creation; but it is always this sort of character that shakes its head most sapiently, and believes most implicitly in its own politic reserve!'

'Who is that gentleman that buys me?' I ventured to ask him.

'His name? Leopold Lance.'

'And is he your owner too?'

'Goodness no!—I belong to Derry Denzil; he only left me here while he went to Paris. He'll be back to-night. Belong to little Lance?—no, thank you! I hate this room

one can't turn in it without knocking something down. You should see Denzil's rooms, big as barns, with nothing less solid than oak, and bronze, and marble in them. This place is for all the world like a woman's stall at a fancy-fair. Women do send him some of the nicknacks—actresses do when they want a puff in the *Mouse*, and would-be fashionable ladies do when they want a line as a leader of society—but for the most part he buys them himself; and then hints with a smile or a word that they come from the Countess of somewhere, or pretty Mrs. Thingamy. Leo's weakness is *bonnes fortunes;* and when he don't get any, he makes them to his fancy; metamorphosing how d'ye does into appointments, and dinner cards into letters of intrigue, just as your costumiers turn a girl out of the streets into a superb Anonyma, till a man spends his whole fortune on the very same creature he gave a penny to twelve months before at a crossing.'

Of this peroration I did not comprehend one word; but it sufficed to make me the reverse of comfortable as to my own future prospects. The good-natured, gallant King perceived my perplexed dismay, and hastened to comfort me.

'You will be well enough where you are going,' he said. 'If you were a man she would pluck you as bare as the back of her hand; being a dog a kick of her boot—thirty guineas a pair her boots are, real silver-gilt heels that go click-clack like a cavalry-man's!—or a mouthful of cayenne pepper instead of biscuit, or some little trifle of that sort, will be the worst she will do for you. And Fanfreluche is there; Fanfreluche is a good little soul, good at the core you know: though she's a little devil with her teeth at times, and the vainest creature living, she is as staunch as steel, and as game as a bantam-cock, and can be a very good friend when she likes. Besides I will have a care for you myself; I sometimes come there with Denzil. And Pearl can never look me straight in the face, isn't it odd? An honest dog's eyes always daunt those women. They seem to think that we scent them out as thieves; though their crowbars may only be cast from the metal of barefaced greed; and their skeleton keys made of men's broken honour—'

'Pearl? who is Pearl?' I interrupted him.

'You will know soon enough,' he said curtly; at that moment my purchaser returned from the inner room, caught me up, and fastened with great care on my collar a pair of

exquisite filigree ear-rings, slipped me and them into a basket, and gave it to a man in waiting, who departed with me without a word.

Of course of where we went I had no knowledge: I was in almost total darkness. The ear-rings I would have scratched to pieces willingly; but the exceedingly narrow space in which I was confined prevented my cramped limbs from any indulgence in such vengeance.

The journey seemed endless to me.

At length, by the sounds I heard, I concluded my temporary abode had been carried into a house and into a room. I thought I had been hours in that wicker-work dungeon; and when, on the lid being thrown sharply open, I sprang out on a piece of blue velvet, I gave a sharp prolonged howl of misery.

For that I got a sharp box on the ear from the hand of a woman, and, looking up, I saw that I was on the lap of one of the most magnificent persons it has ever been my fate to behold.

But O!—how hard her hand had slapped me!

She read a note that laid beside me with some effort, as though reading were unfamiliar to her, laughing a little grimly as she did so; then, tossing it aside, clutched eagerly at the ear-rings to which I suppose it had drawn her attention, and tore them off, utterly regardless of the curls of my hair that she plucked away with them.

The ornaments were very elegant, and their Genoese filigree was all enriched with jewels. She examined them with the keen intentness of a testing jeweller; then put them aside in a mosaic box on a table near.

The apartment was a small octagon chamber, all blue and silver, and exceedingly luxurious in its appointments—genuine luxury moreover, and not the affectation of it that had been visible in the meretricious rooms of the man who had sent me hither. She herself was simply superb—attired in blue velvet that harmonised with her chamber, and was relieved by rich old lace at her bosom and elbows, and a single large diamond at her throat.

The tearing out of my hair had hurt me inexpressibly; and I shrieked aloud with the pain, hiding under a couch.

She gave a gesture of intolerant anger; pulled me from my hiding-place, shook and slapped me till I had no senses

left, and than flung me aside with a brutal violence so that I fell heavily on the sharp edge of the ormolu fender.

Then without even a glance at me, she swept out of the dainty boudour with the mosaic box in her hand, leaving me half-stunned to recover as I might.

I was roused from my stupor by the touch of a very slender cold nose; and looking up timidly, I saw a tiny fairy-like form, clad in blue, with a gold circlet of bells round its throat:—a 'toy terrier,' in point of fact, who ranks in our species much as your *petits crevés* and your pretty *cocodettes* rank in yours. This was evidently the little worldling of whom King Arthur had spoken.

'I am called Fanfreluche,' said the small creature, who had very bright eyes, and a very keen, coquettish, sharp little face. 'I shall be sure to go now you are come. She changes us almost as often as she changes *them*.'

'Whom?'

'Never mind, my dear. You are a child! She hurt you, I am afraid? She can be very violent if you rouse her—'

'Indeed, she can,' said I with a shudder. 'Who is she, pray? Can you tell me?'

Fanfreluche grinned significantly.

'My dear—I know as much about her as most people, but I can only tell you what she calls herself, and that is Laura Pearl.'

'And what does she do?'

Fanfreluche showed again her little sharp white teeth.

'Everything, my dear, that was ever invented by the devil and improved on by women.'

I shuddered again; even in that little market town in the Peak the people had seemed to take it so uncomfortably for granted that the devil and the fair sex were always in partnership and good accord!

'Is she a lady?' I inquired timidly.

'My precious innocent—she has some of the finest jewels in the world. That makes a lady, don't it? She has fine horses; fine servants; fine wines; the best cook, the best laces, the best everything. A lady?—O yes!—the girl that sells cigars, the ballerina that dances in gauze, the housemaids that sweep the steps, they are all ladies now, thanks to jargon and the penny press.'

I did not understand, but Fanfreluche evidently considered she had said something very witty.

'Are you worth much? I doubt not: you come from a very bad lot,' she continued a little superciliously. 'I wonder what Beltran will think of you. Anything he praises is *chic* directly. He said my shape was exquisite one morning; and I went up instantly from twenty to fifty-five guineas.'

The little wicked thing looked so immeasurably vain and self-conscious, as she twisted her head askance to get a sight of her tiny coral collar with its row of gold bells, that she disgusted me; pretty and worldly-wise though she was.

'You cannot be so very much more *chic* than I,' I growled sulkily, 'since you confess you are to be sent away now that I have come.'

Fanfreluche sneered a little; with an indulgent good nature however.

'Bless the baby!' she cried, as though she had been a matron and a mastiff at the least. 'What an ignoramus it is! Why, my dear, she will sell you as soon as she shall have had you a month or two. She sells us all; and the more we are worth the quicker we go—provided she can do it decently. *They* don't know that, you see. O no!—we are always "stolen" or "lost" she tells them. And they are such out-and-out fools—they believe it! And then they send her others to replace us; and the game goes on again; and altogether she makes a very pretty annual perquisite out of her "pets!"'

'She must be a very wicked woman!' I said indignantly, in my hurry.

'Not much good!' said the little creature carelessly. 'I don't know that she's worse than scores of others, though. There was Frédégonde, that I lived with last year in Paris—why Frédégonde would eat up a hundred men a quarter, and all the youngest and the brightest and the best too; and no end of them boys, well nigh young enough to be her own sons!—'

'Are they cannibals, these women?' I cried, utterly bewildered.

Fanfreluche grinned sardonically.

'Yes, my dear; all cannibals. And they eat bones and all; crunch—crunch—crunch;—and get rich, and laugh, and fare gaily over the brainless skulls they have sucked dry, and the hearts they have torn out and devoured!'

I had a dim perception that Fanfreluche was speaking metaphorically, but I was not sure; and her words made me very ill at ease. It was horrible to be in the possession of a man-eater.

'There comes Lizzie. I have to go out with her, but I will see you again,' said the little lady, as a pleasant-visaged maid appeared at the doorway.

'Why are you going out?'

'To be "lost," I daresay. But I don't intend to be lost to-day; I want to see more of you. You amuse me; you are such an innocent! You will soon lose all that, to be sure. This is a capital place for learning the world and its tricks. Does my blue jacket sit right? I can't bear it to wrinkle. Beltran admires my figure so much.'

'The jacket's all right,' said I peevishly, scarcely looking at the little tight-fitting azure silk coat that she wore.

'And who's Beltran?'

'I'll tell you when I come back. Ta-ta, little one,' cried Fanfreluche, hastening away to the chime of her tiny golden bells.

I was very sorry she was gone; there seemed a certain kindliness in her despite her assumption of cynicism, and her unfeminine chatter; and though she scoffed at a good deal, I thought she sorrowed also for some things.

Left alone, I glanced timidly round the room where I lay curled under a sofa: I was looking everywhere for the bleaching skulls, and the broken bones, of all the poor wretches whom she declared had been devoured here. I saw nothing of the kind, and I began to think that she must have been fooling me when she talked of this elegant boudoir as a slaughterhouse.

I saw, indeed, golden tazze, costly china, exquisite pictures, oriental stuffs, silks and satins, and furs, a malachite vase, a jasper table, a little ivory prayer-book, with the twisted monogram in turquoises and pearls upon the cover. Were these what the skeletons and the skulls had been transmuted into by the modern crucible of venial passion and unscrupulous greed?

This solution of her mystery did not occur to me then; but now I know well that it was the right one.

For several hours Fanfreluche never returned. I was left wholly to solitude. I became fearfully hungry, but no

one brought me anything to eat: and in the end, like a child, as I was still, I sobbed myself to sleep, thinking that I would give all the world to exchange the broidered-satin cushion into which I sank, for a bed of moss under Ben's old pines.

It was nearly dark when I awoke by a dainty chime of fairy-like bells, and beheld Fanfreluche by my couch.

'Well, my dear,' she began in her pert patronising way, 'how have you been? Dull enough, poor little wretch. I have had no end of fun. I have been out driving with *her*, in the carriage, shopping and flirting all this time. I love to go to the shops; we are first-rate customers, you know; we always pay our bills, we do indeed. You see we can afford to be honest; it's always one of *them* that writes the cheques! And how splendidly the silk-mercers, and the jewellers, and the milliners, and the florists, and the fruiterers serve us: you see we pay very much better than the great ladies do; we've got the great men's money, and their wives have not. That's how it is. Why! when I go into the bonbon-seller's, they stuff my mouth full with sweetmeats, and macaroons: they wouldn't pay all that attention to a mere Duchess's dog!'

'Is it such a great thing to be a—Pearl?' I asked, hesitatingly.

'A magnificent thing!' said Fanfreluche, with a smack of her lips. 'All the fat of the land, my dear. And all the cream of the milk. There was a time, you know,—I've heard my grandmother talk of it,—when it was a great thing to be a great lady; one of the heads of the nobility, you know. You set the fashion; you ruled the tone; you shaped the society; you could ban with a frown, or elevate with a smile; you were besieged for your ball tickets, and you were the cynosure of all eyes in your dress. But now —bless your heart!—if your are a *grande dame*, you are just nowhere. Nowhere at all, except for wretched little puddling political purposes, if you belong to a "Party." As for all the rest,—Pearl and that lot have it. If you the great lady, bore men with exclusivism, they levant, and go off to Pearl et Cie.; if you want to rule them with a light hand, they kick over the traces, and laugh at you with Pearl et Cie.; if you won't be a dowdy, out of the fashion, you must follow the modes that Pearl et Cie. set; if you buy a

fan, if you go to an opera, if you drive a new-fashioned equipage, if you adopt a costly costume, whether you like it or not, whether you know it or not, you are merely obeying the lead of Pearl et Cie. I have heard old Lord Brune talk of the rules and regulations of Almack's when he was a youth—gracious! the men of our day wouldn't stand one of them. They'd leave the Patronesses to dance a minuette in solitude, and come and make chaff of the old women over Pearl et Cie.'s claret and chicken!'

And Fanfreluche stopped to take breath, having fairly preached herself out of it.

I was very much bewildered, and not at all clear as to what she might mean.

'Then these Pearls are the real sovereigns of the world?' I ventured to suggest, glancing at the turquoise-studded prayer-book, which looked made for a Chapel Royal.

Fanfreluche followed my glance and grinned, till what with her red lips, her white teeth, and her coal-black eyes, she looked for all the world very much like a very small devil.

'O yes! We go to church, my dear, we are very religious, I assure you! Sovereigns, did you ask?—to be sure; and sovereigns you know always did have a nice knack of pillaging everybody right and left, and then dying in the full odour of sanctity. *We*, now and then, die in a hovel, it's true, after all our brilliancy, if we lose our beauty very early; but then so do the sovereigns by the way, if they happen to lose their crowns. So the parallel fits both ways. Yes!—they rule, do Pearl et Cie. If they only saved their money oftener and lost their tempers less often; if they only didn't dissolve their diamonds in vinegar as it were, and fly into passions with their very best friends and paymasters, they might rule the world. They do rule the bigger half of it as it is.'

'But why do men—?'

Fanfreluche interrupted me, turning up her small thin nose.

'My dear! Men like to be cheated and pillaged, and sworn at, and made fools of, and ruined;—they do positively relish it. Or if they don't, how should Pearl et Cie. possess the power men let them possess? A fact is a fact, you know. No good being blind to it. The sun will stay in the heavens however you may blink at him—'

'Then you think—?'

'That the devil himself drilled women: and capital foragers he made of them!' snapped Fanfreluche. 'They don't stand steady fire, they won't fight on the square, and they never can carry out a campaign logically; but for sharpshooting, and pillaging, and skirmishing, there are no guerrillas like them. Hungry are you? Poor little fellow! Well—they will be dining in a couple of hours; then I'll take you downstairs. We live very well here; very well indeed. I never touch a bone—on principle; we give them all away to the poor of the parish. Ah, my dear! you don't dream how religious we are!'

And the tiny creature—she was very much smaller than I—grinned again so diabolically that it positively frightened me to be in her presence.

'When I say we live well,' she resumed, seeming dearly to love her own chatter, 'of course I speak with a reservation. Men and women spoil all they eat with their barbarous fashion of cooking it. Hams boiled in Madeira, pigeons stewed with champignons, chickens smashed up with tomatoes, ducks *bigorrés* with Seville oranges, lobsters drowned in oil and sauces, oysters crowded with truffles and mushrooms—bah! it makes you mad to think of it. Every dog knows better than to spoil two good things with one another; we like the simple flavour, each rich in itself. Who ever saw a dog put two things in his mouth at one time? But these barbarians put a hundred—the flavours of a hundred at the least. And then they call that Babel of contradicting essences and anomalous tastes "good cookery," and the concoctor of it is dubbed a "chef." Bah! I long to bite the legs of every one of the cordons bleus!'

I answered nothing: of course milk and bread and a trifle of cold meat had been my only food, and I knew no more of what she meant than of the flavours of the dishes she mentioned.

But, like everybody who cannot tell a truffle from a tomato, I kept a discreet silence, and determined to show myself a thorough gourmet by liking nothing when I tasted it.

'Of course,' continued the Lilliputian lady, with intense spite. 'Laura Pearl never, I will be bound, having eaten anything except cabbages and black bread in her early days

will never now be content with anything except the brands that are a guinea the bottle, and eatables that are six months at least before their due season. Her dinners and suppers have every vice of the fashionable school stuffed into them. That fellow in the kitchen gets a hundred and fifty a-year; and all he does is to turn good food into claptrap *compôtes*, while his gravies are all glaze and his *pâtés* all pepper. But, goodness! you know nothing about all this; you are a baby. Hold your tongue and let me lie quiet, or Beltran will tell me my eyes are red, and say I mustn't have any chicken.'

'Is Beltran omnipotent here?'

Fanfreluche showed her teeth.

'Just now, my dear—yes.'

'Who is he? You said you would tell me.'

'Beltran? O you little ass! I thought everybody from Paris to Patagonia knew Vere Beltran. There aren't a creature better known. Where on earth have you lived?'

'Not in the world,' I said humbly, feeling fearfully ashamed, like the little coward I was, of my dear old Ben and his little cottage.

'One can guess that, innocent, without your telling one. Well, since you don't know anything, expect to be pretty considerably astonished. We're enough to take the hair off the head of any uneducated being.'

'Are you so *very* wicked, then?'

'Wicked! What a silly old-fashioned word. My dear child, we're only a trifle fast and very intensely fashionable. Wicked!—good gracious, no! And if scandal-mongers say that we play a trifle too high, why it is very malicious of them: and our roulette-wheel is only a pretty toy that anybody may buy for a guinea.'

And Fanfreluche grinned afresh.

'But who is Beltran?' I pursued.

'You'll see him,' said Fanfreluche pettishly. 'He's a very good fellow, though the world don't think so. He owns the Coronet, you know—'

'The public-house?' I asked; for opposite Bill Jacobs' there was an inn with that sign, very much frequented by thieves and dog-fanciers and blackguards of all sorts.

'Public-house? Good heavens, no! Our theatre!

'A theatre! Does he dress in green and spangles and

carry a long white whip?' I demanded breathlessly, thinking of the magnificent persons I had beheld outside the booth at the wakes in the Peak, and believing that I should show that I also knew the world.

Fanfreluche screamed till she choked herself.

'O you dear little simpleton!—you're as good as a play yourself. Why Beltran is a Viscount, you little fool; and he only keeps the Coronet as he keeps his horse and his valet and his cigar-case. His name don't show, you know. Old Aaron is the only man the public ever hears of—the acting manager, you know. Villainous old screw!'

'Lord Beltran is very rich, then?'

'He ought to be!'—and she gazed into the fire with an expression that was plaintive and very serious for this cynical worldly-wise, frivolous young lady.

'But he is not?' I ventured to infer.

'Who says so? It's no business of yours or of mine if he isn't!' retorted Fanfreluche quite fiercely.

I perceived that with all her wickedness, she was a loyal little thing to her friends, amongst whom this Beltran seemed to stand foremost.

'Was it he who bought me and sent me here?' I inquired, to change the subject.

Whereon Fanfreluche became her own sardonic and scoffing self once more.

'Pooh! no. He's an awful fool; but he's not quite such a fool as to purchase a thing of Bill Jacobs. Any dog Bill sells he steals again in a month or two. Don't look so frightened. Laura will sell you herself most likely before Bill gets a chance. Set a thief to foil a thief, you know.'

'A thief!' I murmured, unable to reconcile such language with a lady of whom I had just heard as one of the sovereigns of the world. 'But who is that man, then, who sent me here?'

'Leo Lance, my dear. Only an author.'

'But he gave twenty pounds for *me*.'

'Did he? Oh!—and the ear-rings were two hundred the pair. Yes, I know; that's just the price he got—Beltran gave it him—for that new little thing they are going to play. And he spends Beltran's money so!—*Chut!*'

And the small dame clicked her little white teeth like the teeth of a trap. I saw something was wrong, but I was not aware what it might be.

'Beltran's such an awful fool, you know,' she explained. 'He's one of the cleverest men on earth, and keen as an eagle in some things; but where there's a question of money, or women, or play, or kindliness, pooh!—he's a downright blind bat, an idiot! He pays Leo Lance for a burlesque he didn't want out of pure good-nature—do you suppose he dreams that the Mouse lays the gold out in trying to steal his mistress?'

'I don't know, I am sure,' I muttered vaguely, not having an idea what she meant. 'The Mouse—what have mice to do with burlesques, and what may burlesques be, pray?'

'A burlesque, my sweet little daisy,' explained my patroness, 'is an epitome of the tendency of this age to reduce everything of heroic stature to pigmy proportions, and to render ridiculous all that other ages have venerated. A burlesque is the resource of writers without wit; the grinning mask whereby they conceal their inability to laugh the laugh of humour; the juggling of words and phrases with which they counterfeit the Hudibrastic strength and the Rabelaisian mirth that is not in them nor in their times. There! —that is not mine; I heard Derry Denzil say it; so take it for what it is worth. As for the Mice—that is a name we give Leo Lance, and Derry, and a few others. They've a paper they call the *Mouse*,—a sort of burlesque itself, only Denzil pours real acid into it,—and they are all Mice that write for it; and there's nothing they don't nibble at; and the trap's not set yet that can catch them. But for mercy's sake, do hold your tongue, and let me be quiet and get some sleep. Wake me when the clock strikes eight and don't say a syllable earlier.'

And she curled herself up and slept, and no efforts of mine could arouse her. As for me, I sat the whole time bolt upright, quivering all over with excitement;—mice, actors, thieves, sovereigns, cheese-baited traps, and ivory prayer-books, chasing each other in wild confusion and discord through my brain.

Into what a world I had alighted!

CHAPTER XI.

HE SEES SOCIETY.

PRECISELY as the timepiece chimed eight hours, Fanfreluche awoke and shook herself.

'Come down,' she said. 'They will be soon at dinner. It's an off-week at the Coronet, Easter you know. You see we're so pious; we keep the feasts and the fasts of the Church! Now don't you mind if she raps you hard with her fan-handle, or if the Mice hit champagne corks at you; if you make an atom of noise you'll be turned out of the room.'

'Are the Mice always here?' I inquired, dreading these untrapable rodents.

'You silly! of course not. But they come pretty often—with the others. Beltran's wines are excellent—'

'But is it Beltran's house, then?'

'O you little donkey! of course not,' cried my chaperone, exasperated. 'Of course it's not his house—only he pays for it and for everything in it. Can't you put two and two together? Come along! You will find the dishes burn your mouth; that cook, though they think so much of him, has only one idea of seasoning—and that one lies in the pepper-pot!'

With this she trotted through the half-opened door, and down the pretty staircase with its gilded balustrade and its bright-hued carpets, and into the dainty hall, mosaic paven, and filled with hothouse flowers and small orange-trees.

She led the way into a room that literally dazzled me as I entered it; it seemed one sheet of light; a miniature sun in the blue arc of the ceiling shed down its rays, the atmosphere was heavily scented with pastilles and flowers, the table seemed a-blaze with gold and silver, and the hangings of the walls were azure satin, silver-starred.

There were seven or eight people round the table; and a voice called Fanfreluche. She obeyed its call, and I crept timidly after her, and gazed around from a safe position under a chair.

There, taking courage, I glanced round the room. I recognised my purchaser, and I recognised my mistress. The latter dazzled my eyes like the sun-chandelier above head.

She seemed literally on fire with the superb rubies that glittered all over her, and shone like sparks of flame upon the exquisite whiteness of her skin. Flame-coloured robes gleamed under the black shower of her laces; her scarlet pomegranate-like lips, the rich flush on her cheeks, the lustre of her great brown eyes—all were full of colour glowing like the hues in a stained-glass picture when a red autumn sun streams through it. It was a perfect beauty of its kind.

The splendid lips had a cruel sensuality; the splendid eyes had a hard rapacity; the splendid ruddy-tinted hair shaded a brow that had the low brutal ignorance of the savage set on it. But—with all that youth, that colour, that magnificence of loveliness, who remembered that?

Not they, certes, who sat around her board.

Ah, fools! when you gaze on the 'flower-like face' of a woman, do you ever pause to notice where the animalism speaks through it?—the greed, the cruelty, the lust, the ignorance?

'Animalism,' do I say? I have lived now so long in your world and its cant, that I have caught up all its jargon.

'Animalism,' forsooth! A more unfair word don't exist. When we animals never drink only just enough to satisfy thirst, never eat except when we have genuine appetites, never indulge in any sort of debauch, and never strain excess till we sink into the slough of satiety, shall 'animalism' be a word to designate all that men and woman dare to do?

'Animalism!' You ought to blush for such a libel on our innocent and reasonable lives when you regard your own. You men who scorch your throats with alcohols, and kill your livers with absinthe, and squander your gold in the Kursaal, and the Circle, and the Arlington, and have thirty services at your dinner betwixt soup and the 'chasse,' and cannot spend a summer afternoon in comfort unless you be drinking deep the intoxication of hazard in your debts and your bets on the Heath, or the Downs, at Hurlingham, or at Tattersall's Rooms. You women who sell your souls for bits of stones dug from the bowels of the earth; who stake your honour for a length of lace two centuries old; who replace the bloom your passions have banished with the red of poisoned pigments; who wreathe your aching heads with purchased tresses torn from prisons, madhouses, and

coffins; who spend your lives in one incessant struggle, first the rivalry of vanity and then the rivalry of ambition; who deck out greed, and selfishness, and worship of station or of gold as 'love,' and then wonder that your hapless dupes, seizing the idol that you offer them as worthy of their worship, fling it from them with a curse, finding it dumb, and deaf, and merciless, a thing of wood and stone.

'Animalism,' forsooth! God knows it would be well for you here and hereafter, men and women both, were you only patient, continent, and single-minded; only faithful, gentle, and long-suffering, as are the brutes that you mock, and misuse, and vilify in the supreme blindness of your egregious vanity!

From beneath my chair I surveyed with some interest and with more trepidation the society around the banqueting-table of Laura Pearl, while Fanfreluche, kindly squatting near me, drew my attention to each personage in turn.

'Look yonder, at that tall slender man farthest from Pearl,' she murmured to me in that language which, like the utterances of the fairies, cannot be heard by the gross ears of human creatures. By the way, with all your vaunted superiority, a fly can eclipse you in sight, a bird in volitation, a wasp in architecture, a bee in political economy and geometry, a water spider in aquatic science and subtlety, a—good heavens! one could spread the list over ten pages!

'Do you see that tall fair man with the white flower in his coat?' pursued Fanfreluche; 'the one with the handsome, contemptuous, weary face, the grey eyes, and the dark straight eyebrows, who looks "aristocrat" all over him, and has made his face as expressionless as a colourless piece of repoussé work—that's Beltran. You're afraid of him? So are most people at first sight, and a good many of them ever afterwards for that matter. I don't know why; it's only manner with him. The fools toady him so; he's obliged to give them a good sound kick with his boot-heel of insolence as it were.'

'Why does he keep the society of fools?'

'Little donkey! He lives in the world, don't he?' cried Fanfreluche with immeasurable sarcasm. 'It's very easy to get into ditch-water, but not so easy to get out. Besides, a man as rich as Beltran has been—pshaw! *is*, I mean—can't find a world quit of a flood of parasites, any more than a

salmon can swim in rivers free of minnows. Look there, that little fellow with the brilliant eyes, and the full lips, and the crisp brown hair—isn't that he who bought you? Yes? I knew it. Well, that's the Mouse, Leo Lance. He was the son of a tobacconist, they do say, somewhere down south; but had a classic education, and uncommonly sharp wits. He writes well and he talks well—in his own way; cribs right and left; but wears his stolen clothes so that they look like his own skin. Anyhow, he is in society to a good extent, and lives with the "swells," whom he copies and worships, because they're of use to him; and damns and detests, because they only admit him on sufferance, and don't take him amongst their own women.'

'He did buy me,' I murmured; 'why does he not notice me now?'

'Pooh! he's never seen you before, my dear,' said Fanfreluche, with her peculiar grin of significance—'never! Don't be so indiscreet as to recognise him. The great art in society is to be able to stare our oldest friends in the face as if we'd never met them in all our lives before. It's an art that's always handy; for nine times out of ten you do really want to cut them; and if you don't, it only looks good style to have forgotten people, and makes them feel themselves of no consequence in such a great world as yours—'

'But with real friends?' I began, my mind reverting to my dear old Ben.

'Pshaw! my little daisy,' scoffed Fanfreluche. 'There are no "friends" now-a-days; there are only acquaintances. Beltran is "friends" with ever so many men, whom yet he pills with black balls every time they're put up for his clubs.

'That bright, fair-faced, curly-haired boy is the little Marquis of Montferrat,' she resumed. 'He has been of age a year, and is half-ruined already. What by? O, yearlings, and women, and big *coups* at the tables—the old story! Yonder's Evrecombe, his well-beloved Mentor, who, with the women as his assistants, decoys him into what nets he pleases.'

'A swindler?' I inquired tremblingly.

'A swindler? Good gracious, no!' cried the little lady. 'Evrecombe is a perfectly well-born gentleman. Did you ever see a more elegant person? And the day little Monti shoots himself, or rushes out of Europe with worse dishonour

than death at his heels, his Mentor will sip on ice drink in his club, and murmur serenely, "I warned him!"

'Do you see Deringham Denzil, there?' she pursued after a brief pause. 'Derry, as they call him; a big fellow, awfully handsome; bearded and bronzed like an Asiatic? Looks like a guerrilla chief, doesn't he? with his reckless, devil-may-care, picturesque face, and those great sinewy limbs of his?—well, he is one of the Mice, too; and for a caustic piece of incisive irony, or a wistful tender touch of thought, there is nobody equal to that stalwart debonair brigand. He has a story too, but I'll tell you that some other time That man, with the superb golden-haired head, there, is the painter Marmion Eagle (he's a colossus in the studio, and mad as a March hare out of it; all great artists are); and the delicate handsome creature next him, with a face like some pretty brunette's, is a cavalry-soldier, St. John Milton. He has been cut all to pieces a hundred times, and has seen more service, and killed more men to his own hand, than any man of his years in the army. Hear him tell how he set the skulls of all the Asiatics he had ever killed in a row on the top of the flat roof of his house, one illuminating night, in Calcutta, with the skulls all filled up with clay, and a candle stuck into each, and lighting up the fleshless jaws, and shining through the orbless eyes!—it will make your very blood run cold. But he never does talk of himself hardly—your great soldiers are always very modest over their own bits of derring-do. There, I don't see any one else to tell you about;—of the other two, one is a guardsman, and the other a member of parliament; both pleasant fellows, gentle as women, and wild as the grouse in November. But listen! there's Beltran calling me.'

She trotted up to her hero, who stroked her and gave her a sweetmeat from the gold bonbon-stands on the table; doing this he caught sight of myself, and asked when that new white dog had come.

'I bought him,' said Laura Pearl carelessly; and I wondered her voice did not break the spell of her beauty for all of them, it was so harsh, so coarse in fibre, so metal-like in its resonance. 'A man offered him to me to-day in the Park for a guinea, collar and all, as you see him.'

'Stole him, then?'

'Well, that warn't my affair if he did.'

She distinctly said 'warn't.'

'Yes, it was. What do you buy dogs for? You can have dozens given you.'

'It's a pretty beast, Beltran?'

'O! pretty enough. Looks awfully miserable too. Hungry—eh?'

He addressed the last phrase to me, and in the anguish of my feelings I could not restrain a piteous howl. He laughed, and set me down some croquettes of chicken on his own plate.

'I hate the dogs messing and feeding in the rooms,' muttered the Pearl sullenly.

'Better take care they're fed out of it, then,' said Beltran, in his negligent, indifferent fashion: she looked angered, and struck Fanfreluche a sharp blow with the ivory sticks of her fan.

I wondered if these gentle amenities were the custom between lovers in the fashionable world of Pearl et Cie.

'Worth twenty sovereigns, if he be worth one,' murmured Beltran, surveying me as I ate. 'Pure Lion-dog, eh, Lance?'

'Looks so,' responded the Mouse, putting up his eye-glass to study me.

'Would you know the man that you had him from, Laura?' asked Beltran.

'Good gracious, no! I am sure I shouldn't!'

'And why on earth did you buy him?'

''Cause he seemed dirt cheap at a guinea. What a heap of fuss and nonsense, Vere, you make about that little wretch!'

I turned hot and cold, and trembled over my croquettes: I had only been up at the table one minute and a half, and already I had heard four gigantic, and apparently utterly meaningless, falsehoods! Was this inevitable in 'high society?'

Beltran laughed a little; it seemed to amuse him to be accused of making a fuss about anything, as it did, indeed, appear utterly irreconcilable with the extreme quietism, and half-cynical, half-languid weariness of his habitual tone and manner.

The moments that followed were not sweet to me; for they passed in my being handed about from one to another until I had run the gauntlet of the whole circle. Happily their verdict was favourable; and all of them, Leo Lance the most emphatically, congratulated the Pearl on having so cheaply obtained such a thorough-bred. All, indeed, save

Beltran, who having affirmed again that, if she got me for a guinea, the man had stolen me, shut his lips, and vouchsafed no more on the subject.

The Mouse and those loudest in my praises offered me nothing to eat; Beltran, to whom my presence seemed scarcely satisfactorily accounted for, remembered me, and gave me a slice of a duckling and a handful of almond cakes. After this they forgot me; except when Laura Pearl, with Lance and the little Marquis, amused themselves in frightening me out of my wits by letting off rose-water crackers in my eyes, and pelting me with crystallised chestnuts, till I was both deaf and blind.

'Monkeyish malice, my dear,' murmured Fanfreluche, as an enormous hard bonbon hit me sharply on the eye. 'Boys and cads, and women have it. Go under Beltran's chair.'

I was so confused, and indeed so hurt, though their missiles were only rose-water and chestnuts, that I heard little of all that passed at the table.

Pearl laughed very often, laughed long, and laughed loudly, showing the most magnificent teeth in the world; and some stories were told, which, if not over-decorous, were to a surety wittily, if wickedly imagined. Beyond these the proprieties were in no way violated; and if it was all laughable chatter enough, mere gossip of the day lightly told, there were none of those brilliant scintillations which outsiders are given to imagining as coruscating perpetually in such spheres as this.

Men, as I know now, do not take the trouble to be amusing in the society of Pearl's sisterhood; they pay, and think the purse-strings quite enough to draw, without being wearied to draw also on their mental capital.

What good things there were said, came from the merry mouth of Lance.

'If that Mouse hadn't sung, and didn't sing, he wouldn't feast in this cheese,' Fanfreluche metaphorically explained to me; and when I asked further explanation, added:

'Little goose! Beltran gives him dinners; and he is to amuse Beltran. It's a fair exchange. Do you suppose our Stuart princes don't keep their Will Somers to jest for them? In old times, you know, the noblemen's fools wore motley, and jingled bells atop of their caps; now they wear dress-coats, and half-guinea rosebuds in their button-holes. But

the class hasn't changed a bit. And their lord's whip is an insolent word; and their lord's wage is paid out to them in dinners, and suppers, and water parties, and race-weeks and mayhap, if they're very presentable fools indeed, in a club ballot and an autumn shooting.'

'The poor fools!' I murmured, for fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, and I had just been the butt of crackers and marrons-glacés.

'Poor indeed!' sneered Fanfreluche. 'It's the poor princes, I think! paying all they do for dull wit that they could eclipse in a second themselves if they only weren't too indolent to talk! The fools make pretty perquisites, I can assure you, and run up all the rungs of the ladder in no time. I've seen a fool—in the end—sift aloft, looking sanctity and decorum itself, and gripping his money-bags tight, while the prince sank below in a bottomless sea of ruin, with the sharks of Debt and the vultures of Venality tearing him asunder between them!'

'It is his own fault?' I suggested.

'Not at all!' snapped Fanfreluche. 'He has been ten to one too heedless to watch, and too generous to distrust, like—but you know nothing about it, you are so young; and youth is always as obstinate as it is ignorant, and as illiberal as it is illiterate. I hate youth!

'But you are not old yourself, surely?' I demanded.

'Pooh!' scoffed Fanfreluche, 'I am feminine! And into every feminine thing, my dear, the Devil, before it is born, instils the knowledge of evil: for he still keeps the apples by him with which he tempted poor Eve; only there is but the juice of evil left beneath the rosy velvet skin, for the golden side that held the knowledge of good is all shrivelled up, withered by the winds of sin that blow for ever through the universe.'

And having said this she would say no more, but sat watching with her black and brilliant eyes; and looking so fearfully like a very little but very terrible devil herself, that I trembled, and thought that indeed through the warm fragrant air of the banqueting-chamber I heard and felt the passing breath of that sirocco of guilt which, daily and nightly sweeps over the sick and weary world, and burns it with consuming fever, and will not let it lie in peace, and rest.

The dinner lasted long; there were some thirteen services —I counted them in amaze; at its close there was the scent of variously-scented smoke, and the laugh of Laura Pearl rang louder.

From the table they passed to the drawing-room upstairs; which glowed with ten times more light, ten times more colour, ten times more brilliancy than the other apartment, and was indeed one mass of scintillating gold, and silver, and amber; not a large room, everything in the house was small and *bijou*, but intensely luxurious and very costly.

They had not been there many moments before they gathered round a table on which stood a pretty little apparatus, made of rosewood and ebony and ormolu; a sort of plate, it seemed to me, in which her hand, with its rings blazing forth bright rays, was for ever carelessly tossing a little ivory ball.

What they were doing I could not tell; it engrossed them entirely. Some grew very pale, some very flushed; all were intent, silent, breathlessly eager: and they rarely moved, save when one or other of them went to a marble stand on which claret-cup, and cognac, and effervescing waters were placed, kept cool amongst great glittering rock-crystals of square cut ice.

Their faces wore a curious look, I thought. I have seen it often enough since then at half the gaming-tables of Europe.

I had gazed at them, amazed and entranced, for half-an-hour or thereabout, when Fanfreluche approached me.

'Come away, child,' she whispered. 'It's midnight, come to bed.'

'I want to stay here!' I remonstrated. 'I want to see them—'

'O, do you? They're not attractive to see. Some of them must lose, you know; and some will be drunk when the morning finds them. Beltran won't, but three or four of the others will. There is no drinking now-a-days we're told —O no!—and no gaming-houses either. What a precious clever thing is Legislation; it bars men out from doing a thing in public, and so they go and do it ten times more in private! But then nobody guesses it, you see, and that's all Legislation cares. They've shut up the silver hells, and the gentlemen lose an estate in a night at the Cocodés Club, and stake hundreds on the Red in their mistresses' drawing-

rooms. So Law means to shut up the public-house; and the working men will soak themselves in gin and rum in their own cellars all Sunday long, and pay twenty per cent. more for the liquor because it will be supplied at a risk. O Law is wondrous clever! But do come away, little one, you're only a baby, and this house isn't edifying after midnight.'

'Your Beltran can't be so very good, then, since he is so fond of it!' I retorted, angry to be treated so childishly.

'Pooh, my dear! Beltran seeks what he scorns; and caresses his own ruin. He's not uncommon there. I tell you he's an awful fool, and I never said anything at all about his morals. The world thinks very badly of him; and so may you if you like. Come away—that's all.'

And by dint of threats and persuasions she half drove and half coaxed me out of the room, and into the little, dark, deserted boudoir we had previously occupied.

'Go to sleep, child!' she cried, pushing me on to a soft silk mat; and I was too sleepy in truth to disobey.

Once I awoke myself in my vivid dreams to ask her a question.

'Is that woman *really* a sovereign, Fanfreluche?'

I could see even in the moonlit darkness the grin of her little white teeth.

'O yes, my dear—honour bright. If you doubt it, just go and look in at the fashionable photographic shops: you'll see her between Queen Victoria and the Archbishop of Canterbury; and she sells better, they say, than either the ermine or the lawn. Good-night, and for gracious sake don't chatter!'

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE CORONET THEATRE.

When I awoke the next morning, I certainly found myself in a blue velvet-hung apartment; I stared at myself repeated a dozen times in as many mirrors; I wore on my collar a beautiful azure satin rosette nearly the size of my head; and the man who brought us our breakfast served us minced chicken on a very exquisitely painted china plate;

but I had been more joyous by far on the rough red bricks of Ben's cottage kitchen.

'These fine things don't make one's happiness,' I murmured pensively to Fanfreluche.

'No, my dear, they don't;' the little worldling admitted. 'They do to women; they're so material, you see. They are angels—O yes, of course!—but they're uncommonly sharp angels where money and good living are concerned. Just watch them—watch the tail of their eye—when a cheque is being written or an *éprouvette* being brought to table. And after all, you know minced chicken is a good deal nicer than dry bread. Of course we can easily be sentimental and above this sort of thing, when the chicken *is* in our mouths where we sit by the fire; but if we were gnawing wretched bones out in the cold of the streets, I doubt if we should feel in such a sublime mood. All the praises of poverty are sung by the minstrel who has a golden harp to chant them on; and all the encomiums on renunciation come from your *bon viveur* who vere denied himself aught in his life!'

'Then everybody is a hypocrite?'

'Not a bit, child. We always like what we haven't got; and people are quite honest very often in their professions, though they give the lie direct to them in their practice. People can talk themselves into believing that they believe anything. When the preacher discourses on the excellence of holiness, he may have been a thorough-going scamp all his life; but it don't follow he's dishonest, because he's so accustomed to talk goody-goody talk that it runs off his lips as the thread off a reel—'

'But he must know he's a scamp?'

'Good gracious me, why should he? I have met a thousand scamps; but I never met one who considered himself so. Self-knowledge isn't so common. Bless you, my dear, a man no more sees himself, as others see him, in a moral looking-glass than he does in a mirror out of his dressing-box. I know a man who has forged bills, run off with his neighbour's wife, and left sixty thousand pounds odd in debts behind him; but he only thinks himself "a victim of circumstances"—honestly thinks it too. A man never is so honest as when he speaks well of himself. Men are always optimists when they look inwards, and pessimists when they look round them.'

I yawned a little: nothing is so pleasant, as I have known later, as to display your worldly wisdom in epigram and dissertation, but it is a trifle tedious to hear another person display theirs.

When you talk yourself, you think how witty, how original, how acute you are; but when another does so, you are very apt to think only—What a crib from Rochefoucauld!

However, of course I did not think this then; I only thought that I wished Fanfreluche was not quite so much given over to the love of her own chatter, and inquired of her how we were to spend the morning.

'It's a chance, my dear,' she responded. 'She's always amusing herself; but she'll leave me to split my very throat with yawning all day long sometimes. They're awfully egotistical, those women—especially *this* class. You see all their girlhood through, they lived hardly; and were beaten and worked, and half-starved; and thought a scrap of bacon or a scrag of mutton a feast for the gods; and could hardly pin their rags together enough to look decent, or keep the wind and the rain from their shivering bodies. Well!—when they come into this world, and are dressed like empresses, and stuff sweetmeats all day long, and drive hither and thither, and eat and drink of the best the earth gives, why naturally they can't have enough of it. And their necklace stones are as big as walnuts; and their wines are poured out in floods; and their dishes are all over seasoned; and their horses all step up to their very noses; and their houses are gilded from the area gate to the attic. They overdo it all in fact, just because they are in love with it; and in the same way they are in love with pleasure, and exaggerate the pretty prancing creature till her laugh is a roar, and her dance is a breakdown, and her smile is a grimace, and her rosebud is a peony, and her bright frolic is a frenzy.'

And Fanfreluche snapped her teeth together, with the air she always wore when she thought she had said something that was especially clever.

I listend bewildered and awed.

'But *she* never came out of hard life and starvation?' I breathed scarcely audibly.

'I don't know where she came from, child,' returned Fanfreluche pettishly. 'I declare you spoil all generalities by

dragging them down to personalities—you are almost as bad as a woman. As for starvation—may be not. That was a figure of speech. But she came from obscurity, my dear,—she can hardly read: she can hardly write; she don't speak common grammar even now! She'll get awfully drunk on her Jules Mumm and her Poméry; and she's as common and vulgar a creature, in all save her beauty, as any Irish fish-woman that ever swore at old Billingsgate. You know she was playing in burlesques at a horrid little East-end theatre, when *we* first heard of her (I lived with Frédégonde then); Freddie is dead now; killed herself with absinthe, and too many truffles. Old Lord George picked Pearl out of the East; and first set her going in this sort of style, in a little villa, with a pair of cream ponies and all the rest of it. Lord George died, in less than three months, of apoplexy, in at White's one night; and Laura had two or three adventures, picking up no end of jewellery, and gold, and nicknacks on the road as it were. Finally she threw herself at Beltran's head! and he took her to Baden; then brought her out here in the burlesque of Corinne and the Crowner, last Christmas. Act! No, she can't act a bit. She has no talent. But she can look amazingly striking; and she poses wonderfully well; and as at our house we have chiefly those burlesque or extravaganza pieces, good looks and attitudes are perhaps the chief things that we want. Besides, she don't depend on that: if Beltran broke with her, which he's scarcely likely to do, and if she didn't take another engagement, she'd have her handsome face and that dear little innocent roulette wheel! Pearl, so long as she is only the fashion, can make her thousands as fast as she pleases—'

'But had she really nothing then, two years ago?'

'Pshaw! Those—Pearls never do have anything while they live in their oyster-shells. That is, till they've broken a man or two. When Lord George—he was an old virtuoso, you know, my dear, and poked about in very queer places after his bric à brac!—first lit on her in Houndsditch, or Shoreditch, or some ditch or another, she was drinking gin and eating tripe in a little kennel of a room off her music hall, where she showed for two shillings a night, and lived in an attic with a low comedy man. He took a ten-pound note for giving her up, and said he'd never sold a bit of trash half so profitably in all the days of his life—'

'What was her real name?' I pursued, haunted by this vague fancy, which yet seemed to me utterly incredible and insensate.

'I'm sure, my dear, I don't know,' scoffed Fanfreluche. 'They never have any real names. There may be women who have no alias; but there are no women who have only one! She called herself "Laura Pearl" when she came amongst us. If a mare win the Blue Ribbon of the Turf, what on earth does it matter whether she has been christened Venus Anadyomene, or Sally, in the stable where she was foaled? She has won the Derby; and nobody cares a straw what her name is. They pile their money on her—'

'But they do care what her race was?' I hinted with an acuteness that surprised myself.

'Ah, to be sure they do,' assented the little lady. 'But then, my dear, men are much wiser about their horses than they are about their women. They look for vice in their racer's eye, but they never heed it in their mistress's; and though they wouldn't bet a single shilling on a screw, they'll squander tens of thousands on a vixen!—'

'Since she was this vile low creature, why did you tell me she was a sovereign?' I grumbled in reproachful wonder.

'Because she is one, you daisy,' said Fanfreluche, with curt acerbity. 'The good people are afraid of "mob-rule" in Europe just now,—the fools!—the very dregs of the mob rule already; the Mob Feminine raised on high from the gutter, with its hands clutching gold, and its lips breathing poison, and its vices mimicked in palaces and its lusts murdering the brains, and the souls, and the bodies of men!'

I made no reply; I was a little impatient of her exordium, and I was pursued with this strange thought which had risen in me, and which I rejected as madness.

I remembered the girl in her russet bodice with her yellow glass beads round her throat, chaffering in the ivy-hung porch over the open pack of the little withered old pedlar;—I remembered the woman who had blazed in her rubies, and her flame-hued radiance of colour, under the fiery glow of light in her supper chamber; it was not possible that these twain could be one?

I felt blind and giddy, and sick at heart.

'You are ill, you little simpleton,' said the sharp yet kindly voice of my monitress. 'If you can't stand the sight

of evil in this world, lick up some arsenic at once, my dear! Ah! there's Lizzie come for us for a walk. She is a good creature;—yes—though she serves a Pearl. A woman may be virtuous in any atmosphere if she like. Lizzie hates evil with all her soul—to be sure she is ugly, poor thing, which makes innocence come easier!—but she was once brought by accident into the service of the Pearls, and now nobody of another class would take her, and she must work and get her wages, or her old mother would starve. So she stays. There is good to be found everywhere, my dear, if you only look for it—and excellence in nothing.'

With which she trotted out of door into the Park, which was nigh at hand; and I followed her, very sad at heart still.

For no young thing can be consoled by the negative comfort that good only barely balances evil on earth; and the assurance that excellence is as unattainable as the four-leaved shamrock. When we are very young we could better bear evil in extremes if thereby we could only obtain good in extremes likewise.

It is the certainty that vice and virtue are so fearfully even; so perfectly weighted and measured in the same scales; so entirely impotent one against each other; which makes their drawn-battle through all the ages,—for which no end is perceivable in the future,—so dreary, so depressing, so hopelessly melancholy to all creatures that possess the chivalries of an innocent youth.

In the latter half of the day we went out again; and this time I was promoted to the dignity of the front cushion in the dainty little equipage which Laura Pearl drove herself, with a tiny groom standing behind her, and two of the handsomest grey ponies on the town in her silver-plated and red-ribboned harness.

She did not drive with any sort of skill, and she used the whip unsparingly; but she drove with fury, and without any fear whatever, so that her science appeared considerable and her narrow escapes were many and startling.

It was raw chilly spring weather, the Easter week falling early that year, and there were not many people in the Ladies' Mile; but she never stopped under the leafless trees without being surrounded by a bevy of good-looking, well-bred men; and she did not sweep round the turning at full trot without all the eyes that were there following her in

admiration. Indeed so great was the homage she received —for even some women in splendid carriages gazed at her with intent interest—that I began once more to think that she must be a crowned queen of some kind, and that Fanfreluche had only been laughing at me when she talked of two shillings a night, and the Argyle Rooms, and the Low Comedy lover who took ten pounds.

'Look, how they stare after her, and how the men bow?' I whispered to Fanfreluche. 'She must be very eminent and powerful in some way?'

'Never said she wasn't, my dear,' returned that cynic with a grin. 'She's one of the best chaff-cutting machines for chopping up men's fortunes and souls in double quick time that has ever been wound up and set going on earth!'

'But they can't worship wickedness?' I expostulated.

She grinned again.

'Can't they, my dear? Will you tell me what they do worship then? The greed of the capitalist, the fraud of the diplomatist, the time-serving of the statesman, the lies of the journalist, the cants of the author, the chicaneries of the merchant,—they are all worshipped if only successful. And why then object to the successful vice of a woman? You know the Ark of Israel, and the calf of Belial, were both made of gold;—Religion has never since changed the metal of her one adoration.'

I did not understand, and kept silence, watching the scene that to me was so strange and beguiling; though Fanfreluche turned up her nose at it, because, being Easter week, there was nobody in London, as she said with much scorn:—even her beloved Beltran having gone with that noonday to Paris.

After the Park, we drove to the shops; and my impression that our charioteer was a regal ruler, and that the chatter of Fanfreluche was untrue, was deepened by the excessive deference with which the bowing shopmen treated her.

They came out, and stood bareheaded in the sharp east wind, listening reverentially to her commands; or when she descended, and entered their establishments, welcomed her with that hideous subserviency of the snob-mercantile to a good customer, which can only be equalled by his equally hideous brutality to a penniless debtor. We followed her,

Fanfreluche taking the initiative, and nothing could exceed the civility of the business people; in one place they gave me a ball, in another they fed me with macaroons, in a third they let my little dusty feet trample a new amber satin dress unchastised, in a fourth they kissed me.

I became quite puffed-up with pride.

'You little idiot!' sneered Fanfreluche. 'You think it's for yourself? My dear, if Laura Pearl liked to go through the town with a boa-constrictor, every shopkeeper would fondle the reptile, and stuff him with rabbits. She pays better than anybody going—you see she's so astonishingly honest! If *they* get arrested she'll only shrug her shoulders; but she'll always keep well to windward of White-cross-street herself!'

I did not answer. My mouth was full of my red-leather ball, and I thought some jealousy lurked in the cynic, because when they gave me a macaroon they only offered her a very plain biscuit.

I did her wrong in this. But whenever yet did any living creature not prefer to imagine ill-natured envy in a friend, than to suppose a compliment to himself insincere?

By the time we had been through half-a-dozen of these establishments, the pony-carriage was piled high with scores of tempting packages, covered with the crimson-lined tiger-skin.

'What can she do with them all?' I asked, getting over my anger.

'She don't want one of them.' said Fanfreluche curtly, as though the plain biscuit still rankled in her mind. 'But she likes to get them, and strew them round her, and break them, or burn them, or toss them to her maid. Ah, my dear, you little dream the ecstatic delight that exists in Waste, for the vulgarity of a mind that has never enjoyed Possession, till it comes to riot at one blow in Spoliation!'

'I do wish you would answer me plainly,' I said sulkily, without—without—'

'Epigrams?' she added sharply; 'I dare say you do, my dear. Epigrams are the salt of life; but they wither up the grasses of foolishness, and naturally the grasses hate to be sprinkled therewith.'

At that moment we had reached our home, which was an elegant little bijou house, near the Park; and Laura Pearl,

as she was about to put her jewelled whip in the rest, hit me a sharp crack with the long white lash as I jumped out eagerly to the ground; I shrieked, and she laughed:—I felt sure *then* that she was no sovereign, but only a very vile woman.

'What had I done?' I asked piteously of Fanfreluche; wishing now that I had given her the macaroon.

'Nothing in life, my dear,' she replied. 'She hits you as she ruins them—because she finds fun in the sport. But you see she never hits me—why? Because the first time she did I bit her. To show your teeth, and make them felt too, is the only way with women like her. She whips you, and you crinch to her—she'll hit you a dozen times in a day. She flies at them, and they give her a cheque, or a diamond, or a carriage-horse;—she'll have her furies a dozen times in a week. If you treated her to your teeth, and they to a few sound curses, she would trouble neither you nor them any more—'

'Is Beltran even afraid of her?' I whispered.

'Well, he is!' said Fanfreluche, with a sigh. 'He's as bold as a lion with men; hard as nails in the hunting field; fought two duels abroad in his young days; and saved five sailors from a sinking ship last autumn. But he is afraid of the Pearl. Not afraid of *her*—you know, but afraid of a scene, which he hates; afraid of her temper, which is the devil's; afraid of her vengeance, if ever he left her. Afraid—well! afraid, as the boldest men are of a woman whom they know is bad to the core, yet whom they love for her beauty, and fancy is faithful to them, and have trusted with more secrets of their lives than they care to remember. Why do these connections often last all the years that they do? Love?—Pooh! Very little of that; but very much of the force of habit, and very much of the dread of annoyance.'

'But why put themselves in the power—'

'Tut, my dear! Why does a lad climb a walnut-tree when he knows a spring-gun is underneath? He only thinks of eating the walnuts; and always trusts that this one particular spring-gun is unloaded.'

'Well, some guns are rusty and will not do harm?' I had heard Ben Dare say that the guns in the preserves were thus sometimes after heavy rains, and I thought the allegorical allusion came in neat and pat.

'Possibly, my dear, said my lady, who did not like other people to be epigrammatic. 'But if a gun ever rusts enough to prevent explosion, no woman ever lets her power of evil rust long enough to get out of use! And now scamper upstairs to Lizzie; I want my dinner. There'll be no fun to-night; Pearl goes to dine with a Whig Duke (the Privy Seal), at one of the big inns.'

'Why does a Duke have to dine at an inn?' I asked in wonder; my only notion of an inn being derived from the little public of the Miners' Joy in Derbyshire.

'Why, you simpleton, he don't invite Laura to dine with his Duchess at home, does he? Besides, these huge hotels are charming. Last season I belonged to the Guards; and I went every Sunday with them to their crack dinners at the Leviathan.'

'I thought the Guards had a mess?'—I had heard the bull-dogs talk of these things.

'You goose, so they have. But they can't take Pearl et Cie. to it; and they like Pearls on a Sunday. Pearls are their way of keeping the seventh day holy; so they dine at the Leviathan, or Richmond, or Greenwich. Get upstairs!'

We spent a quiet evening, when the mistress of our destinies had swept down to her brougham at nine o'clock, gloriously apparelled in a marvellous glimmer of hues, and fountain spray of laces. Fanfreluche looked after her with a grin.

'If she only never drew off her gloves and never opened her lips, who on earth could tell her from the proudest *grande dame* of them all? She'll come home in good humour. Privy Seal has a very grand, gracious fashion of doing things. She'll be sure to find a big sapphire drop in her bonbon-cracker, and a jewelled holder with a rare flower or two by her plate, and very likely a mechanical humming-bird to fly out of the épergne, and nestle in her bosom, with a choice ring in his mouth. His grace has very pretty inventive ways. But he's cut down all the woods round his noble old castle: and he won't pay one of his son's debts at Ch. Ch.'

'Does he pay his own?'

'My dear!—a Duke and a Privy Seal never is asked to condescend to such a commonplace!'

'Is Beltran jealous of him?'

'Pooh! Jealous isn't his form at all. He's the most

indifferent of mortals, though he is in love with her in his way. Besides, he *thinks* she's faithful to him. He couldn't do more if he were a husband; and she a Griselda and an Arria Pætus!'

And Fanfreluche grinned again with the look which always made my blood run cold, and made me believe that after all this good-natured, bitter-tongued little black thing might prove in the end a limb of Satanus. Which was an uncomfortable thought of the only friend that I now possessed in the width of the world.

'The Coronet's open to-night,' said Fanfreluche to me a few evenings later. 'There's the new extravaganza coming on. When she goes do you follow me, and nip into her brougham, and hide yourself as I do under the silk mat. She won't notice, ten to one, or if she do notice she won't care, so long as we make no noise. I often go myself; it's awful fun. They quarrel fit to kill themselves.'

And with much trepidation of soul I prepared to follow my daring leader. At a little before eight Laura Pearl passed out to her neat night-brougham; and with rare good luck we eluded all vigilance, and were concealed among the curls of the friendly mat and covered by the flow of her velvet skirts without any one being aware of it, or at least attempting to eject us.

I shivered and trembled; of where I was going I had no sort of conception. And from what I had seen of the stage at the Wake-feast I was firmly persuaded that 'play-actors' were chiefly armed with whips and swords; and that there was always first and foremost amongst them one red-and-white devil, in a motley-painted skin, with a mouth grinning from ear to ear, who thumped everybody right and left, and sat down upon babies till they were flattened to pancakes.

If there should be a clown here?—and if he should sit upon me?

However, curiosity is, generally speaking, a stronger passion than even cowardice, and it proved to be so with myself.

The Coronet, as I learned subsequently, was a very fashionable theatre. It had ruined everybody that had ever had anything to do with it; and had therefore made good its title to fashion as strongly as Pearl had made hers.

It had been erected some dozen years; and in that space of time had brought to grief no less than fourteen various

proprietors. The veritable owner of it was, oddly enough, a country clergyman, to whom it had been left by his father, a metropolitan contractor, who had first built it, and then claimed it for debt. His Reverence was a strictly Evangelical person, and, as I have heard, denounced the autumnal fair held in his south-country village with fearful anathema. But he did not sell the theatre; and every half-year his lawyers transmitted him six hundred pounds, the biannual rental of those hapless mortals who had been severally trapped into becoming lessee. The good lessor drew the money, but always ignored the source, and spoke vaguely thereof to his agents as 'my late father's properties in the west-end of town.'

I have heard also that the defunct contractor left him two gin-palaces; but of this I am not sure: at any rate, this reverend person had so many thousands a-year in addition to his piety, that his bishop presented him with a living of very high value, feeling it apostolically incumbent upon himself to obey the precept of 'to those who have much shall much be given.'

The first lessee of the Coronet had been a man in the Guards, whom it had ruined in one winter season. It brought him so deeply into the Jews' hands, that he had to sell at a ridiculous loss.

The person who succeeded him, being an actor himself with some capital, should have known something of what he was about. He was fool enough, however, to attempt high art, and was smashed utterly in a twelvemonth; exquisite scenery, for which he had paid 700*l.*, going at auction for 20*l.*, and genuine buhl cabinets, purchased in Paris for 200*l.* apiece, being knocked down for a 5*l.* note. I believe he died very miserably in a wretched estaminet in the north of France, as a man deserved to do who insulted the London public by offering to improve its taste.

It would fill pages to recount the various adventures of the various proprietors of the theatre, which I heard by degrees from the omniscient little Fanfreluche. Few escaped with only a scorch from its furnace that smelted their gold so fast: none escaped with entire impunity; many cursed it loudly and deeply. One pretty boy (although so young, already in your parliament, and of great promise there), the younger son of a great peer, took it for an actress

whom he adored—a beautiful brown foreign singer, for whom on his little stage he brought out the delicate, delicious Venetian *bouffe* opera, that was caviare to the English musical world. In two short seasons, the boy-politician spent so much over this miniature opera and over her, and plunged so hopelessly into the abyss which money-lenders dig for the young and the rash, that on a stilly June midnight, just as the hour the House was closing to the public and opening to its privileged few, a shot was heard in his own little brilliant supper-chamber; and when the people flocked thither, they found him stretched across its threshold—dead.

Some said that a scene he had by chance witnessed between his dark lady and one of his own comrades in her retiring-room had more to do with it than even his losses in money. It might be so; at any rate, the Israelites put in claims for thirty thousand pounds, spent in those two seasons when he had kept the Coronet open. They said also that when the beautiful brunette found him lifeless, with his own bullet through a heart that had scarcely beaten three-and-twenty years, she shrieked and wept, and tore her hair in agonising grief; but all the same she drew in the big onyx ring off his left hand, and unhooked from his watch-chain the jewelled locket that held her portrait.

All these things, of course, I heard later. At the moment we drove up to the stage-door, the Coronet was leased by our friend, Vere Essendine, Viscount Beltran, who had owned it for the last two years or so, and who (as it was whispered) had lost as much as any of his predecessors, even in that brief space, only that he would probably choose to show longer fight, and would not so quickly prevail on himself to relinquish a favourite amusement.

'Keep close to me,' whispered Fanfreluche. 'Close!—or else you'll get stolen.'

As we descended, the glow of the countless gas-lamps, the pressure of the waiting crowds, the huge letters on the glaring posters, the noise and the confusion, and the glitter of the cross-lights so dazed and terrified me, that I was in danger of forgetting her injunction, and being trampled to death in the street. However, by some miracle, I escaped destruction, and followed my patroness through what appeared to me the most hideous dark passages I had ever beheld.

'She goes to dress. I will show you over the house,' said Fanfreluche in her pertest manner, as she trotted along through this seemingly interminable maze.

I heard loud gay bursts of music; I was blinded by alternations of sooty darkness and of blazing light; huge walls of canvas trembled like the shaking walls of an undermined house; vast barriers of timber and of iron loomed above-head and around; loud shocks of sound reverberated through the melody-filled air, as men in paper caps pushed to and fro, in grooves, enormous masses of wood and metal. I was surrounded by devils, imps, fairies, butterflies, peasants in white muslin, shepherds with ribboned crooks; woolly lambs standing on two legs and sucking their thumbs; green and white water-lilies with their arms akimbo, and their tongues thrust in their cheeks at a joke; a winged sylph drinking from a pot of porter, and a golden-haired wood-elf smoking a cigarette. In a word, I was in that mystic region commonly known as 'behind the scenes.'

My first impression was, that it was a Pandemonium amidst an earthquake of canvas and timber; my second, that it was extraordinarily commonplace with all its bizarrerie, and intensely vulgar and dreary with all its glitter.

The time was an entr'acte; the previous piece was ended; the burlesque not begun. From the body of the house, of which I caught an oblique glimpse, there came at intervals, above the music, hideous shrieks, hisses, and stamping noises.

'The gods are impatient for a break-down,' said Fanfreluche to me; though why gods were there at all, and why they desired any one to break down in their performances, was not within my comprehension.

She hurried me hither and thither with breathless rapidity. I could only catch flying speeches, and passing glimpses.

'My old man's in front. He'll be good for a necklace when he sees me in this here,' said a Water-lily, twisting herself round in the shortest and most transparent of gauze tunics.

'A necklace of brass farthins, then!' sneered the gold-haired Wood-elf. 'A ugly old cove like that, as is a filthy Jew-pawnbroker, by the looks on him!—'

'He ain't!' screeched the Lily. 'He's a real live lord, and you knows it. He's Lord Algernon Vereker—he is!

It's only yer spite, 'cause the stalls don't care a dam for yer cellar flip-flap! Did ever you get a boo-kay, Miss, in all yer born days? Leastways, since yer mother sent yer out to sell yer pennorths o' tripe and greens?'

What the injured Wood-elf might reply, and what fearful and veiled sarcasm might lie in the tripe-and-greens allusion, I never knew, for I was hurried away to a little dirty bare room, where three Fairy Princes were eating hot kidneys and drinking bottled porter.

The three Fairy Princes were gorgeous in bright satins and gold lace, and showed elegant legs in white silk stockings; and would have been all three really very pretty girls, but for the terrible red paint round the mouth, and black paint under the eyes, and greased white powder on their foreheads and arms.

'Who's in front?' asked Prince Azor, with her mouth full of kidney.

'O, all *her* swells,' said Prince Silvertongue savagely, 'and all the Press lot. First nights is always just alike. Packed!'

'I see your little chap in the stalls, Mary Ann,' said Prince Charming. 'You oughter do business with him. Uncommon soft; good for a bracelet a-night, if you keep him well in hand—'

'Better nor that!' said Prince Silvertongue scornfully and mysteriously. 'Ain't there no hysters? I hate kidneys, leastways unless I'm at Evans's.'

'A cursed bad piece this here,' grumbled Prince Charming. 'No; there ain't no hysters. A cursed bad piece. The Mouse have spiled it out and out, just to give *her* her dances and attitudes. He's awful spoons on her. I've a good mind to pay forfeit, and go to Alhambra.'

'O, lawk! Do take care, you stupid! You've upset all the rouge, and it's a-running among the gravy!'

'Stupid yourself!' retorted Prince Azor, who was the one apostrophised. 'You've addled your head along of that gin sling. You've only got two lines to say, and I'll swear you'll say them upside down—'

The call-boy's shrill treble was at this instant shouting, 'Miss Delany, Miss Visconti, Miss Villiers!' And answering to these patrician names, away the Fairy Princes rushed, leaving the rouge to fraternise with the kidneys,

and their quarrel to wait over till the next pause in the performances.

'Curtain's up!' said Fanfreluche curtly, as a storm of applause greeted the appearance of the three Princes, who appeared to be prime favourites with the audience, and who were smiling with radiant sweetness before the 'floats.'

The shrill treble vociferated afresh:

'Madame de Rohan!—Miss Plantagenet-Courcey!'

I gazed breathless, to behold the representatives of those historic and time-honoured races, so dear to me through my favourite French Memoirs. The two who responded to the call were my friends Water-lily and Wood-elf, as they in their turn sprang on with light pirouettes and fond embraces before the footlights.

Away after them went pell-mell the imps, and the lambs and the shepherds, in what appeared to me inextricable confusion, though they kept perfect step to the music, and soon formed figure dances out of the chaos.

'What in the world is this?' I asked, in a very agony of amazement.

Fanfreluche turned her little nose in the air.

'The merest business, my dear! The sort of senseless whirligig all these things open with. Give the public twenty pair of good legs a side, and you may treat it to just what hash of puns and balderdash of verse you like. But we *do* do the thing better than most houses. Beltran has all the dresses from Paris; and he sent over the imps themselves from the Folies-Marigny. English children always have too much flesh to make into sprightly demons —and a heavy glum devil's a dreadful thing.'

With that she rushed under a white-bearded, ruby-robed king's legs, and darting round at the back of the scenes brought me out on the other side of the stage.

'Look at him!' said my chaperone. 'He only comes early first nights. How indifferent he is! And yet there's over a thousand gone clean in this blessed burlesque to-night, not to speak of all the expenses afterwards!'

She referred to Beltran, who leant with his back against an iron girder, and a cigar in his mouth, talking to two other men; with a look of that utter indifference, and of that curious quietude, with which such men as he are pleased to cover the natural restlessness and recklessness of their gamester's temperament.

'Nearly a thousand pounds gone to-night,' I cried aghast, 'and he can look like that!'

'Pooh, my dear,' scoffed Fanfreluche. 'Last season, when I belonged to him, he lost three thousand one night at a certain club where they don't play money down—more's the pity!—and he walked out of it just as calm as he is now, and smoked, and read a new story of Derry Denzil's through before he went to bed.'

'He must be enormously rich?'

Fanfreluche grinned.

'My dear, I've seen a millionaire bemoan himself for days over a five-pound note left in a railway carriage; but if a man bears troubles and losses easily, why, I know he's a gentleman and a beggar!'

'But how can a beggar have thousands to lose?'

'Don't take one so literally! You literal people are the bores of society and the murderers of wit. Look there—that tall big fair man with him is one of his pet freinds, Paget Desmond, of the *First Life;* and that other one with the stoop in the shoulders and the red beard is the great *censor morum*, Dudley Moore, proprietor and editor of the *Midas*. All social sins shrink under his scourge;—what a pity they haven't that alliteration in the burlesque!—and all social sinners are mercilessly exposed under his searching lantern. There is no one comparable to him for stoning a man of genius in his virtuous fury; there is no one touches him for moral lessons, conveyed with a scholarly asceticism that utterly ruins the transgressor whom it rebukes—'

'And yet he is here to-night?'

'O yes, to see the forty pair of legs! And has in town a meek-eyed mistress to whom he is moderately faithful because she "stands being sworn at" so well; and keeps down in the south a charming little abode that bears the closest family likeness to the Parc aux Cerfs. His virtues are nobly printed on fair white paper; his vices are only written on the dusky rags of broken honour.'

'He must be a very bad man?'

'Pooh! He is a great man; and wields a great power—in its way. Why, my dear, if the *Midas* condescend (which is doubtful, for it is æsthetic and highly intellectual) to say that our forty pair of fine legs have placed us at the very

tip-top of high art and of moral excellence, why the public will say so after it. Other ages gabbled their paternosters because they were priest-ridden; ours gabbles its platitudes because it is press-ridden.'

But I was tired of hearing her chatter, and looked around me.

Close by was a door that stood a little open; beyond it was a very comfortless sort of dressing-room; not much better than that in which the fairy princes had eaten their kidneys; and out of it, as a butterfly from its dingy chrysalis, emerged at that moment Laura Pearl.

She was exquisitely arrayed in golden tissues, that floated about her like sunlit air, and showed all the curves of her form, all the grace of her limbs, while a girdle of real sapphires flashed fire beneath her breast, and a coronal of the wondrous blue lilies of the western world glowed above her brow.

'She's about as much as they'll stand,' muttered Dudley Moore.

I surmise that he alluded to the transparency of her draperies.

Beltran nodded to her, without removing his cigar.

'Knew those blue lilies would tell,' he murmured. 'You look very well, Laura.'

'Thank you for nothing!' she responded graciously, with much scorn. 'I go on now, don't I?'

'In a minute. Little Courcey is encored in that forest song.'

The Pearl's brow lowered and darkened: the first scene had taken about ten minutes; the audience had not yet beheld herself; and yet they were stopping to encore the Wood-elf (who was certainly charmingly pretty) in a little snatch of a ballad of ten bars!

'What a fright that Courcey girl always makes of herself!' she muttered. 'Who saw her dress?—she's like a bundle of green twigs and grass!'

'I should be very happy to see her dress,' responded Beltran. 'Unluckily, she locks her door.'

The Pearl flashed a savage glance at him.

'Well, if Paris couldn't give you better nor that in costumes,' she laughed viciously, 'you might just as well have gone to a tally-shop. What do you say, Mr. Moore?'

'My dear lady! I buy so many second-hand articles when I pay my staff for their written opinions, that of course I stand up for tally-shops with all my heart and soul!'

Beltran laughed; and Laura Pearl glanced rapidly yet stupidly from one to another, as though suspecting them of making fun of her.

At that juncture the Mouse rushed in from the back; tremulous, agitated, flushed, eager.

'You should be on, you should be on!' he cried to her. 'For mercy's sake don't keep them waiting!'

'O, gammon! They'll wait as long as I choose!' she retorted; but however she thought better of it, and as the elves, and the lambs, and the imps, and the devils rushed off the boards in two opposite armies, she glided herself on to the stage in her character of an enchanted water-queen; with whom the three fairy princes were destined to become wildly enamoured.

From where we stood, an oblique view of the stage, and of a little piece of the stalls, and of the stage-box on the opposite side of the house, was obtainable. The fury of applause was great; even the stalls clapped their delicately gloved hands; and she was received with tumultuous welcome.

To me she looked only a very scantily-dressed woman, going through strange antics in a labyrinth of wooden beams and flapping sails of painted canvas; but I supposed she looked very different from the 'front.'

That is just the difference that makes everything so curiously altered to different spectators. And your stall-lounger always thinks your stage-carpenter such a prosaic dolt; and your stage-carpenter always thinks your stall-lounger such a consummate fool; and will so think, no doubt until the end of time; at least so long as stalls and flies shall have their being.

All that followed only bewildered me more utterly than ever.

It seemed one endless succession of wild rushes hither and thither on the part of the elves, and lambs, and shepherds, and devils: and of the most unaccountable conduct in the fairy princes, who combined the most mediæval of dresses, and the most chivalrous of heroics, with the broadest of street slang, and the wildest of casino dances.

There was a romantic minstrel, love-born and desolate, with curls that hung to his waist, yet who bore a banjo and sung a yelling negro melody. There were river gods, with a noble old Neptune and a beauteous young Aquarius, who yet at a certain point discarded all dignity, and abandoned themselves to the Cancan in a manner worthy of students of Paris. There were charming delicate nymphs who at a signal became living aisles of roses, or blossomed severally into glowing azalea shrubs, yet who after realising all the Greek dreams of Dryads and Hamadryads, burst all at once into a comic chorus that made the delighted house literally shriek aloud with laughter.

Finally, there was the enchanted princess herself, who looked like a poem and moved like a picture, with the bright azure lilies, and the blue flashing sapphires; yet who, at the very moment in which she was rescued from her captivity and betrothed to Prince Silvertongue, broke forth into a doggrel declamation, and danced with all the vigour of a sailor, and all the license of a *débardeur*, first the hornpipe and then a breakdown! And—O shade of outraged Thalia—what applause she got!

'I think it's a success,' said Beltran quietly, when, the piece having come to an end, the house shouted for her, and for the Princess, and for the Wood-elf.

'Not a doubt of it,' answered Dudley Moore.

'I'm glad little Courcey's got a call,' said Paget Desmond. 'She's a jolly little girl.'

'She's the best lot amongst 'em,' assented Derry Denzil. 'That little rat's as honest as the day.'

'They seem to take to it, don't they?' asked Leo Lance, pale and breathless.

'Yes; I think your're pretty safe this time, Mouse,' assented Beltran. 'But for heaven's sake don't make them talk such awful nonsense, next thing you do.'

'Nonsense,' echoed the Mouse. 'Why that's just what makes it swing smooth. If there'd been ten ounces of sense in it you'd have heard nothing but hisses.'

'He's quite right,' said Dudley Moore gravely. 'The lucky knack of combining the most perfect scenic effect with the most utterly unredeemed vulgarity in speech and gesture is the great essential of dramatic success. Here he has very fittingly wedded *Undine* and the *Belle au Bois*

Dormante in his story,—two of the most delicately poetic legends in their different manners that we possess; and he has mixed with them break-downs, balderdash, casino dancing, street jargon, countless execrable puns, and occasional indecent allusions. The result is success. The barbarism and *bizarrerie* of the whole thing is undoubtedly rather funny, and precisely hits the popular tastes and desires. I congratulate Mr. Lance immensely myself. The wisest man possible is the man that knows his own age.'

The poor Mouse looked dissatisfied and chagrined at this questionable form of felicitation: but he did not dare to complain of the almighty Censor's sarcasm.

Beltran laughed, a little impatiently.

'What a patriotic task, then,' he said with a dash of self-contempt, 'to supply the sinews of war to those barbarians!'

Dudley Moore shrugged his shoulders.

'My dear Beltran, you must be patriotic, for you amuse the people at a loss, I believe, of some fifty pounds a-night every season. But that isn't your fault. You supply them with what they like best. Our ancestors performed their mysteries and their mummeries at different seasons and on different stages; but we, who don't believe in the one and are fearfully bored by the other, mix them both together, and take the decoction, indifferently, both in Lent and at Christmas.'

'But we are not so bad after all?' said Denzil. 'I suspect that sort of cry has been raised in each century. Look at those gospel parodies, those religious plays you speak of, in the Middle Ages. Were they really anything so very much better in taste, do you think, than these burlesques and pantomimes of ours?'

'Perhaps not better. But I say they were duly distinct from the fooling; and the fooling too was more genuine than ours, I am convinced. Pantomime was once the genius of gesticulation: the Pulcinella, the Stenterello, the Scaramouch, the Arlecchino, required talent of no slight sort in the mimics who represented them. To tell a whole tale solely by the means of gesture and facial expression—that was ingenious at the least. But what ingenuity is there exhibited by a man's louping about in woman's clothes, spouting bad puns; or in a girl's casting herself into the violent and ungraceful postures of the Cancan? It is simply vulgar, unredeemably vulgar.'

'Well, the modern public likes it,' hinted the discomfited Mouse.

'Of course. You know the Roman story of the people rating the pantomime plays a thousand times higher than those performed by "only" the living *personaggi*. Well, your public, Mr. Lance, is much like the Italian populace. They will have the scene painter, the sensational realism, the Lancashire clog-dance, the pot-house jig,—the wooden puppets, in point of fact, bobbing upon wires,—sooner than they will have the living flesh and blood; pathos, and passion, and genius.'

Beltran threw his cigar away, right into a heap of tinfoil and muslin.

'You're quite right; it's awful stuff,' he murmured. 'But when I tried classic art with that wonderful French woman—you remember?—the gallery was crammed full, but the stalls yawned awfully the first night, and never came afterwards. Now look at the stalls; we've had to add three rows to them. And what's done it? Nothing but Laura's breakdowns.'

Dudley Moore took snuff out of a tiny box.

'My dear fellow, people don't want to think after dinners of a dozen services. High feeding and comet wines induce a frame of mind in which good ankles and bad puns are far preferable to anything that displays intelligence in the actors, and requires intelligence in its auditors. Pray don't attempt to return to high art while you've those forty pairs of fine legs and the Pearl's cellar-flap dancing.'

'Hang you cynics!' said Beltran. 'Come and have some supper.'

At that moment Laura Pearl came off the boards, she and Prince Silvertongue, literally covered with bouquets; the little Wood-elf had only one, a mere cheap knot of early roses, deftly tied with a blue ribbon, probably the gift of some boy-artist or young musician.

'You did that amazingly well, Laura,' said her lover going up to her; 'I'm really very much obliged to you.'

'O bother!' she responded graciously. 'It's a wretch of a piece, little Mouse; you should have given *me* all the breakdowns, and I've only that beggarly one at the end. Vere, do send me something to drink into my room. I'm dead-tired, and as thirsty as pigs on a market day.'

'So you had a call at last?' said Beltran kindly to the little Courcey, as the Pearl disappeared in her dressing-room, 'And some flowers too, I see.'

The Wood-elf's blue eyes sparkled.

'It was that little song, my lord, as Mr. Denzil put in for me. Mayn't I sing it every night? Do let me!'

'Of course you may. It is in your part.'

'But—but,' whispered the Wood-elf, who seemed shyer than any other of this astonishingly voluble and dare-devil sisterhood, 'if you won't be angry, *she* said as how she'd have it cut out. She couldn't abide me being called along of her; and if I don't have the song they'll hiss me.'

'Confound her!' muttered Beltran, as the poor little Wood-elf turned hot and cold at her own temerity in adventuring a remonstrance against the person who was omnipotent with the lordly owner of the Coronet. 'You shall have the song, never fear. I'll speak to Wynch myself about it.'

Wynch was the acting and ostensible manager; and the Wood-elf's soul was comforted.

'What he says he'll do, he'll do,' she murmured, cherishing fondly her knot of roses, while the costly bouquets showered at Pearl were first stripped of any bracelet, note, or other article they might contain, and were then cast aside to wither as best they might.

At this instant Prince Silvertongue, passing me hastily to get across to the room on the other side where the porter and kidneys had been indulged in, kicked me sharply with her scarlet boot, and tore some of my hair out with her gilt spur. Naturally I shrieked loudly with the pain, which for the time was very severe.

Beltran heard and took me up under his arm as he went, followed by Fanfreluche, to his own supper room; a very pretty apartment, hung with amber, and uniting in it the elegance of a boudoir, the luxuriousness of a smoking-room, and the artistic disorder of a studio. The same room, I heard afterwards, where the boy-politician had shot himself six years before.

'Why will you bring these dogs here, Laura?—they are always getting kicked, or snubbed, or stamped on by some one or other,' he asked her impatiently, as she appeared in this chamber, having changed her attire with marvellous

celerity, to the velvet and lace of her home dinner-dress.

'I bring 'em because I choose to bring 'em,' she answered him sullenly. 'That big brute of Denzil's is often enough in the place.'

Now, she had not known that we had been with her, and, as Fanfreluche had averred, might have kicked us out of her brougham had she done so. What then could be her motive for this speech? Simply, I imagine, to disagree with him, which was a form of amusement that seemed to afford her never-failing refreshment.

'Denzil's dog can take care of himself. These little things can't,' he answered her. 'By the way, Derry, that's a charming little song you put in for that Courcey girl. Lance is awfully in your debt for it, and so am I.'

Laura Pearl's arched eyebrows lowered, and her eyes beneath them grew full of flame and gloom.

'Little Courcey has a pretty voice,' Denzil answered. 'If she were well taught she'd come out wonderfully. The girl's a game little thing too—keeps straighter than any one of them.'

This last phrase he muttered *sotto voce*.

'She squeaks like a penny trumpet,' the Pearl observed with savage scorn. 'And what you stuck in them ten bars for, Denzil, beats me. I'll have 'em out to-morrow.'

'No you won't,' said Beltran quietly.

'Won't I?' she cried furiously. 'Then all I says is, Beltran, you may find who you can for my part, for I'll never go on your stage no more to have calls and bouquets and thingumbobs flung at that little minx aside of me.'

'Very well,' said Beltran carelessly. 'There are lots of people can do the breakdowns; and you know that's all you *do* do, Laura.'

'I'll write a song for you too,' added Denzil, with wicked intent. 'That's easy enough: and the Mouse can make room, I daresay—'

'When you know I can't sing!' she shrieked in a gust of passion. 'And as for you, Lord Beltran, if you *could* get people so easy out of casinoes to fill your hole of a theatre, why wasn't you successful with 'em before I come? Answer me that! And as to insulting of me for that wretched little toad of a Courcey, I'll see her and you—'

But I had better not record the foul language with which

she polluted her handsome quivering lips, and transformed one of the most beautiful women Nature ever created into a hissing, mouthing, furious virago.

Beltran sat quite unmoved under the tempest, employing himself in concocting a continental drink with ice, forced strawberries, and a little Chambertin wine. Indeed, for aught any one could have told, he might have been as deaf as a stone.

'I wouldn't agitate myself if I were you,' he said very quietly, when the hurricane of her words was exhausted. 'There's your favourite *ris de veau en demi-deuil;* hadn't you better eat it?'

And she did eat it. The men round the table, of whom there were some eight or ten, could not help smiling at this anti-climax.

Beltran still devoted himself to his ice with the gravest face possible. But I fancy that Laura Pearl knew, somehow or other, that she would not be permitted to carry her point about the Wood-elf's ten bars of song.

'He cares nothing about little Courcey, my dear,' Fanfreluche explained to me under the table. 'But he cares a deal about keeping his word. Won't she make him pay a price for it,—just!'

Apparently her good-humour was restored by the *ris de veau;* at any rate her murmurs were drowned by Derry Denzil, who had one of the mellowest and most flexible of voices, and who, sitting down to the piano that occupied a nook in this pretty supper-room, chanted, with gay music of his own, some camp-songs of the Austrian army, in which he once had served.

The Mouse came in, radiant because the carriages were standing thick in two ranks down the street, and because the doorkeeper had averred that every one had gone away delighted with the entertainment. He was genuinely hungry also, from anxiety and suspense, and could in verity eat the dainty things provided, which the other men who had hurriedly left their dinner-tables to be present were not. In consequence they had only trifled with claret, or drunk brandy and seltzer, whereas he really was thoroughly ready for the larded game and the mayonaise and the oysters; and he managed to devour very nearly as much as Laura Pearl herself, chattering with voluble mirth all the time, and

bringing an element into the society which was very much wanting there; since the conversation, having commenced in disputes, had declined into ennui.

After a little time they all began to smoke—the Pearl included, though she threw away much more of her cigar than she consumed. While the Coronet's lights were out in every other part of the house, the players gone home, and the great doors shut to the street and locked, laughter reigned in the bright amber-hung room; and the chimes of a neighbouring clock were tolling two in the morning when they all sauntered forth by the stage-exit and went into the cool white moonlight to their waiting cabs.

'It's a success—an out-and-out success!' I heard the Mouse mutter to Denzil as they lounged out to the air.

'For you,—yes!'

'Well! Why not for him?'

'Why?' replied Denzil slowly, with a big cheroot in his teeth that resisted all attempts to light it. 'Why? O, because it never makes any difference to him whether the Coronet pays or loses. Old Wynch will tot up *your* half of the profits correctly, because you've very bright eyes, my dear Mouse; but Beltran—well, Beltran may be permitted to see that his gallery brings him in a surplus of something like eighteenpence halfpenny a week. That will be about it, I fancy.'

'He's a confounded ass!' muttered the Mouse.

'Yes, he is. He trusts Wynch and you.'

And Denzil, with a short good-night to them all, strode away in the moonlight alone, while Leo Lance waited to murmur farewell to the Pearl and to close the door of her brougham.

'Are you coming, Vere?' she asked sharply of Beltran.

'No, thanks. I'll go and see what they're doing at the Cocodés.'

And he turned away to get into a hansom and drive rapidly to that fashionable night-club, where the highest of high play was to be obtained all through the early hours of the dawn.

The Mouse had his rejected seat in the brougham.

'A lift' was the least she could give, I suppose, in return for my ear-rings and me.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRONZE.

In attempting to jump into the brougham my feet slipped, and I fell heavily to the ground. No one perceived my accident, and the carriage moved on quickly, while a shrill little yell from within it told me that my faithful little chaperone and cicerone alone had witnessed, and was powerless to help my misfortune. I was stunned for a moment or two by the sharp concussion, and lay panting and scarcely sensible on the hard stones of the deserted street.

A good Samaritan, who was the only passenger past the loneliness of the darkened and melancholy theatre, saw my plight and paused by me. He was a rather large, rough, brown dog; his coat was very shabby and tangled, as if worn by wind and weather; and he had a very sad tender face, that made me think of old Trust's.

He stopped and sniffed me, and drew me gently out of the roadway with his teeth. I was, or fancied myself, too much hurt to move, and lay right in the way of all passing carriages, indifferent to all danger from their wheels.

'You are a poor tiny thing to be all alone at this time of night,' he said to me kindly. 'What are you doing? Have you lost yourself?'

I told him my adventures.

He was not a dog of the world evidently, for he knew nothing of Pearl, or Fanfreluche, or even the name of the theatre under whose porch he had drawn me: consequently it was not in his power to lead me aright, or indeed to help me in any way, save to shelter me with his bigger body from the wind, which he did with much care and tenderness.

'Will you take me home with you?' I ventured to ask, emboldened by his honest kind eyes.

'I have no home,' he said mournfully, 'otherwise I would. I sleep under bridge arches, or doorways, or anywhere I can; where I am not hunted away—'

'But that must be very miserable?'

'Yes, it is miserable. But there are tens of thousands of human creatures that do the same. I must not complain. Sometimes I am allowed to lie in an empty basket, in that

great market where they sell vegetables and flowers; there it is very warm and safe, and the sweet scents of the thyme and the lavender, and all the cool wet leaves, make me dream I am in the country once more.'

'You came from the country?'

'Yes,'—his eyes grew unutterably sad.

'Why did you leave it?'

'Well—I followed my master. He was but a lad, barely twenty; his people were poor, and he was restless at home, and he had dreams of wondrous things that he could do in the great world, if only his steps should once wend thither. It was a sweet, happy, fragrant place—that little farm where we lived; all in the heart of the green fresh pasture-lands, and the apple-orchards, and the blossoming high hedges, with the little brooks singing beneath them. But Harold was ill-content there. He had music in his eyes, and fever in his voice; do you know what it is that I mean? Well, he would leave them—the father, and the mother, and the little girl Gladys—and would go forth on his own path to some greatness. I do not think he ever knew what; but dreamt of all impossible beautiful things. They wept sorely; but he—he came smiling away. I followed him. I had been his in his childhood, and he had always been good and gentle to me; my heart nearly broke at quitting that fair green place of my birth, but what could I do? I could not let him wander alone.'

He pauzed; there was no sound save of the night winds stealing sadly through the empty portico of the deserted theatre.

'Well—he came straight hither; came out of the pure free country, and from the sight of the sun, into this furnace, where men's souls are for ever consuming, and the smoke of their passions and woes is spread, like a veil of darkness, between them and heaven's light. The lad had dreamed divine dreams, that I know; I have seen the look on his face when he walked under the summer stars, or saw the moon burn through a night of frost. And he came here—here!—to squalor, and vice, and manifold miseries, and ceaseless greed, and a fathomless gulf of unmeasured iniquity!'

'What he really strove to do I cannot tell. He strove hard, whatsoever it was. He wrote all the day long in that

little, dusky, blackened attic, in the roof under the smoke-cloud, which he had chosen instead of the bright, broad, wooden chamber, under the great oak boughs, with the birds singing against the lattice, that had been his at his home. He wrote—wrote—wrote, all day and all night too, till all the colour died out of his face, and all the light out of his eyes.

'At times he would go abroad, and wander amongst strange crooked streets, and enter first one house and then another. And in one he was met with derision; and in a second with coldness; and in a third with a rebuff; and so on in every one of them; so that he left each with his bundle of papers clenched in his hand, and the broken bent look of an old man on his lithe young form. Yet he never seemed wholly to lose courage. He would write, and write, and write again; and go again to these houses, or to fresh ones, with his eyes all aglow with hope; and again come forth from them with the glow quenched, and his steps dragging slowly over the stones. And all this time he had but little money; and it grew less and less; and soon we all but starved.

'Many tender letters came to him from the little farm in the orchard-country, but I do not fancy he ever answered them. If he did he was too proud to tell them that all their fears were true, and all his dreams were dead. For if he had only once hinted to them of his want, I know that they would have stripped themselves to the last coin to send him help, and the child Gladys would have worked in the fields as a reaper rather than ever have let him need unaided.

'Well—each day grew worse than the last; and his cheeks grew hollow, and his eyes wild, and his hand when it touched me, burned like flame. He still wrote—O yes—but he wrote at night only, and all the other hours through he wandered to and fro, to and fro, in the endless maze of streets. It is sad to be young, and alone, and utterly miserable, in a great city that has no time to think of you, no glance to give you, no ear to lend to your sighs!

'And at last one evening he would go out alone; he would not have me with him. He stooped and kissed me on the forehead, and I felt great hot tears fall on me as he did so; but though I begged and prayed, and moaned and entreated all I could to go with him, he put me back into

the room, and closed the door on me, and I heard his steps go swiftly down the staircase, and out into the street. Well —from that hour he has never returned.'

'He is dead then?' I asked, awe-stricken.

'Ah! that I cannot tell. I am looking for him always, dead or alive. After a little while the people of the house drove me away with blows, when they found that he did not come back. I used to lie in the street before the door day after day, night after night; they would throw wood and stones at me: they wounded me sorely often, but they could not make me leave the spot while there was a chance of his coming there. It is so horrible—to lose a creature you love, into darkness like that. Men can speak and explain, and other men pity and aid them. But we—we can only suffer and wonder, and be wretched and dumb!'

I listened, awed and full of sorrow—this loyal, faithful, tender-souled creature, Humanity in its besotted arrogance called a lower beast than Laura Pearl!

'Have you never seen him again?' I asked softly at length.

'Never again. But I look for him still. I must find him still. I must find him at last. One man was good to me and would have given me a home, and fed and caressed me; but I could not stay with him; I could not go to comfort and rest whilst the boy was unfound. I seek him everywhere. Sooner or latter I shall know where he is—'

'But you must suffer greatly?'

'Suffer? Yes. But so did he. I have hunger and thirst continually; a drop of muddy water, a scrap of offal, is all I can get without stealing, and I never will steal. The people beat me and kick me, and the boys stone and hoot me —you see, I am nothing but a stupid stray dog to them. And they are cruel.'

'But could you not find your way home to that country place that you love?'

'O yes. It is fifty or sixty miles from this city, but I could find my way well; I should know the road, and I could walk in less than a week. But how can I go home whilst I leave him here? How can I see them all again without him? If I knew he were dead indeed I might go; they love me, and perhaps in some sense I could comfort them; but until I do—whilst there still is a chance that he

lives and may want me—I have no right to turn my face homeward. If I went and forsook him, do you think I could sleep one moment in peace, though I were to lie in my old nest among the sweet hay in the apple-loft under the oak boughs?'

I was silent. The greatness of this unselfish elevation appalled me. This rough country dog could feel such fidelity and nobility as these, whilst the men and women I had quitted—

'Forgive me, little one,' he said kindly, imagining that he had wearied me. 'In babbling of myself I have forgotten your troubles. What can I do for you? I have nothing in the world, and not even a kennel to share with you.'

'What was your master called?' I asked, still haunted by the story, to the exclusion of my own woes.

'Harold. His people's name was Gerant, but we always called him and his little sister Harold and Gladys. But do not let us speak more of them. I want to aid you if I can.'

I could not tell him how, for I saw no possible issue to the dilemma; but I begged and prayed of him not to leave me. I had such a dread of Bill Jacobs', finding and seizing me.

'Ah, you are afraid of the thieves?' he said gently. 'They never touch me. See what a protection it is to be worth nothing! A valuable dog and a rich man, have no true liberty in their lives, for they are for ever being hunted and trapped by the spoilers. I will not leave you; and I can still keep a rabble at bay, though I am old, and my teeth are not strong. We are as well here as anywhere; the portico keeps the wind off a little.'

So we sat there while quarters and hours were several times tolled from the neighbouring church; and he warmed me with his rough, curly body, and tried to his uttermost to shelter me from the unaccustomed exposure of the night. Carriages flashed past; now and then a foot-passenger went by; but no one took any notice of us.

Now and then there came by us a man of distinguished appearance, walking slowly, with his hat over his eyebrows, and his face very pale. When I saw such a one I guessed that he had been playing at the Cocodés, or at some other of the night card-clubs of this fashionable quarter, and had lost. Now and then such a one would be accosted and pestered. and cursed horribly when he put her aside, by some wretched,

haggard, painted phantom of a woman that made one's blood run cold by even a look at her wolfish leering, hungry, eyes.

'Poor creature!' I said involuntarily, as one of these—the worst of any I had ever seen—came by us.

'Poor indeed!' said my good Samaritan. 'And yet, after all, this is rather a sham sentiment that we are guilty of when we pity these women so profoundly. For they call our brothers, the lions, beasts of prey; but how holy are their ways, how continent, how innocent, how merciful even the worst that they do, beside these women! These women murder the young of their own kind. What lion, what animal, ever did that?'

'But they have been tempted?'

'Well—yes,' he said thoughtfully. 'And how? Look you here. A few nights ago, as I was seeking Harold in all likely and unlikely places, I strayed into a Casino not very far from here. It was one where gay, rich, foolish youngsters go to see dancing women, and specially to see one now who is a sort of empress there—they call her Lillian Lee. She "shows herself nightly to the populace for gold" —that was a line I heard Harold quote so often.

'I took a long look at this Lillian of theirs before they saw and turned me out. I knew her then. The last time I had seen her she had been hop-picking in our fields some five years ago at harvest-time.

'That girl had as good a mother as ever breathed; a widow-woman, but full of thrift and cheerfulness and virtue. They lived in a pretty little cottage, hard by the water-mill; the mother bred poultry, and took the fowls and ducks to market, with herbs and a few vegetables that she grew, and she washed linen for the old vicar and two or three other people. She was always a contented woman, and loved her daughter—well, as only mothers can love. If the girl had been but like her, they might have been very happy. But you know it is of no use to sow wheat upon stone and sand.

'Letty—that was her name—Letty had nothing of her mother's temper in her. She was for ever sulking, and fretting, and refusing to work, and squandering her pence on finery, and mooning away her days in the sun. The only thing she would do was a little hop-picking in the season, because there were many men about, and idle play, and

licence that was worse than play, in the hop-grounds, where all the wild Irish and the labourers on tramp came, and wasted far more than they worked for most of the time they were there. One day at the middle of the hop-getting, when Gerant came in to the noonday dinner, his face was very grave. He was a quiet God-fearing man, and it was but seldom that he allowed anger to stir in him. "Lettice Dean must never darken these doors again," he said to his wife—the children were not as yet in from the fields. "She is vicious and vile; she turns to sin as bees to sugar. Have a care that she comes no more nigh to Gladys."

'The mistress asked trembling what the girl had done, and he answered her that Letty had wanton ways, and he had surprised her love-making with one of the drunken Irishmen, where they stood under a hedge. A little while after that the poor woman Dean came weeping sorely to Gerant and his wife, and told them how the child had left her without a word, taking all she owned with her. She had stolen even her dead father's old pinchbeck watch from under her mother's pillow whilst the old woman slept, and had carried off even the few little bits of silver spoons, and salt-pots, and such like, that had belonged to her great grand-parents, and were the pride and treasure of the cottage. Well, they traced her to London, I believe, and there they altogether lost her. I only found her the other night—as Lillian Lee at this Casino,'

'And you think her temptations were—?'

'Greed, and vanity, and discontent. No others. She loved wickedness and pleasure; she robbed her mother whilst sleeping; and she went to vice because she desired its wages.

'By the way, the old woman died; lost all heart and strength, and could no longer labour for her own support, and would have gone to the workhouse but for Harold's father and mother, who, in the press of their own poverty, tended and succoured her to the end, which indeed was not long in coming. Now, wherefore should we pity this creature—Letty Dean or Lillian Lee?'

'The flowers hang in the sunshine and blow in the breeze, free to the wasp as to the bee. The bee chooses to make his store of honey, that is sweet and fragant and life-giving; the wasp chooses to make his from the same blossoms, but

of a matter hard and bitter and useless. Shall we pity the wasp, because of his selfish passions he selects the portion that shall be luscious only to his own lips, and spends his hours only in the thrusting-in of his sting? Is not such pity —wasted upon the wasp—an insult to the bee who toils so wearily to gather in for others, and who because he stings not man, is by man maltreated? Now, it seems to me, if I read them aright, that vicious women, and women that are of honesty and honour, are much akin to the wasp and to the bee.'

I was silent. His grave gentle speech recalled to me my old familiar friend Trust, and seemed so strange—and yet so simply-wise—after the satiric sharpness and the acidulated worldiness of Fanfreluche. The one was so tenderly thoughtful, probing to the core of all things; the other was so contemptuously indifferent, skimming the surface of all truths. And yet—when all was said—the Samaritan and Satirist alike pointed to the same deduction! These words of his moreover, recalled to me the vague fancy that had moved me as to the past of Laura Pearl.

Ah! these women may well be rough to us, and shrink from our eyes, when we remember so many things that they have consigned to the grave of oblivion, and which they believe they have sealed down for ever, because they have rolled to the door of the sepulchre a burial stone of gold!

'It is very cold for you,' said Bronze kindly, waking me from my half-sleepy reverie. 'Bitterly cold for spring. I do not mind it; I have been houseless all the winter, which was a hundred times worse than this; but you—how you shiver!'

'It is nothing,' I tried to say valorously; 'you have lost Harold long, then?'

'All the winter, and all the autumn; and he lived in wretchedness here—about a quarter of a year—rather more. That makes eight, or ten, months. Gladys will soon be getting into womanhood.'

'Is she a pretty girl?' I asked him, wondering if she also would ever be transformed into a Pearl or a Lillian Lee.

'More than pretty. Letty Dean was pretty. Gladys has a beautiful little face, like a white crocus of the spring. She was a strange child too—so silent, so gentle, so dreamy,

and some said not very wise. But her eyes would blaze like stars when Harold read poetry to her, and I fancy myself that she thought over-much for her years; and that she had—what do they call it?—genius; and that it was only because she was silent that people fancied her simple. It was odd: those two children led such quiet, ordinary lives: rising with the sun; eating food of the plainest; always in the open air; rained on by summer showers; blown on by autumn winds; seeing nothing except the animals and the birds on the farms, and having no books except their Bible and their *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the plays of a man they called Shakespeare:—and yet there was something noble and uncommon about them; and they seemed always to be hearing such wonderful things when they lay on the grass, or wandered under the trees.'

I understood what he meant. I had seen something of the same thing in poor Ben.

But by this time I was so tired that I ceased to hear him speak, and I fell sound asleep, and forgot that my cushion was only the stone step of the Coronet theatre. The wind and the rain did not come upon me, for Bronze lay down by me in such fashion that his brown curly body was a firm barrier between myself and the elements. There is a wondrous deal of kindness in men and in dogs—women, I do not think, have much of it.

> 'O woman! in our hours of ease
> So smiling, soft, and glad to please,
> And steadfast-rooted as the oak,
> And patient-tempered as the moke,
> Let only cash and stiff be failing,
> An awful tongue hast thou for railing!'

This elegant parody had been sung by the three fairy princes in the Mouse's burlesque, and had been received with exceeding applause; and it was wandering still through my brain as I sank to sleep under the portico of the Coronet.

When I awoke it was dawn—one of those cheerless grey dawns that early spring brings in cities.

In the Peak these mornings had been beautiful; by reason of the seas of white cloud-like mist, the sweet damp dewy scents, the water-drops that glistened on every leaf and blade, the purple glimpses of the half-hidden hills, the

soft unearthly hush that reigned over all things, till the low twittering of the little nest-birds broke its silence. But here—here it was only cold, ugly, impressibly dreary and dispiriting. I woke in consequence sorely frightened and sorrowful; and the tender-hearted Bronze had much ado to console me.

'I am so cold!' I moaned. 'And so hungry too!'

'How long is it since you had food?' he asked.

'Ever since six last night!'

'Ah! And I have been two days without picking up anything, save a piece of mouldy bread that lay outside an area-gate! But then I am old, and very hardy, and you are helpless and young; that makes a great difference. Well, I suppose if we wait long enough, the theatre people will come, and they will know you—will they not?'

At that moment, through the dim light in which the day and the gas feebly struggled for dominance, there approached the form of a man, looming large through the dusky and yellow steam of the fog.

It was Lord Beltran.

He was walking slowly, with his great-coat thrown back as though he sought the chilly air; his head was bent, his face was pale, and the stephanotis in his button-hole drooped—dead.

I sprang out on him, and managed to arrest him. He paused and raised me.

'Is it you, you little atom?' he said kindly. 'Has she left you here on purpose? Not likely though, as you're of value!'

And with that he took me, thrust me kindly and carelessly into his pocket, and moved onward. I struggled, and whined, and contrived to call his attention to Bronze, who was looking on with wistful and patient endurance of oblivion.

He whistled Bronze to him.

'You look stray and starved, my friend. Come along too if you like.

Bronze understood; and came timidly near, and touched his hand with a grateful motion of his own rough tongue; but he did not move after us, and the last thing I saw of him were his two sad, kind eyes, gleaming with their soft hazel light from out of the portico darkness.

My heart was full at leaving him thus. But what could I do?

I was horribly cold and hungry; and this is a combination which kills sentiment in bigger people than myself. The emotions, like a hot-house flower, or the sea-dianthus, wither curiously when aired in an east wind, or kept some hours waiting for dinner.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUNDAY MORNING.

In ten minutes or less I was comfortably installed in Beltran's chambers, which were but at two or three streets' distance from the theatre. They were the two prettiest rooms I have ever seen in my life, connected with an archway, and decorated with imperial blue; they were the abode of a refined gentleman, of a connoisseur too moreover; things of great antiquity and much beauty were scattered about; ivory, bronze, marble, china, enamel, metalwork, gleamed out of the prevailing hue of deep azure; and here and there nestled a mirror, and here and there hung a picture.

Beltran set me down on the hearth-rug, and cast himself into an easy-chair, having changed his dress for a velvet smoking-garb that his man brought to him.

'Give the little beggar something to eat, Ferrors,' he said of me to his servant; and then composed himself to read and to smoke.

I liked his face better than I had hitherto done. It was very delicate and thoroughbred, with that handsome profile which seems to mark like a brotherhood your English aristocrats. It was cold and contemptuous indeed in expression, but by the kindliness that came, when he smiled, into his calm languid eyes, I thought that much of this cynical indifferentism was only surface deep, and much of this serene insolence was only a trick of manner.

When I came to know him well I found, indeed, that Vere Essendine, Lord Beltran, was one of those persons very hard for men and very easy for dogs, to read. There

were, to mislead his own kind, the slighting languor of habit, the contemptuous serenity of manner, the listless fatigue of tone, the continual suppression of all feeling beneath phrases of half-sardonic and half-ridiculing brevity, that are common among those of his order. He was not a little reckless, moreover; was given to seeking his own amusement, without reckoning its cost either to himself or others; and although no one ever remembered to have seen him out of temper, he could be very merciless with his quiet indolent speech on occasion.

But dogs saw much more than these: dogs noticed that he was never ungentle to them; that he never forgot them; that he smiled with his eyes as well as with his mouth; and that he, like themselves, took punishment without complaint, not from insensibility, but from the courage of breed, and the endurance of training. And the stray ones of our kind would know this, by that peculiar prescience of our own which you are pleased to call 'instinct' because you cannot in the least comprehend it; and they would follow him home, and trust themselves to his pity and shelter: will you have anywhere a surer witness to character?

I imagined that he had some punishment to bear just now; the novel dropped on his knee as he sat, and his eyes were fastened on the fire that burned brightly within his pretty porcelain-panelled stove.

Once he took from his waistcoat pocket an old letter, with some figures jotted on it in pencil; studied them, and thrust them back with a muttered word that sounded like a curse.

The figures, I doubt not, were those of his play losses that night at the Cocodés.

Soon after that he drank some soda-water, and went to bed. I did so too, and I shame to confess slept soundly, unhaunted by so much as a dream, of the poor patient Bronze, whom we had left in the chilly bleak dawn, alone with his hunger and sorrow.

We hear a very great chatter of 'sympathy' in this world: is there aught of it, I wonder, that is anything beyond fellow-feeling?

When I fairly awoke on the morrow it was noon; and there were four or five men in the inner room, where a table was laid out with breakfast.

It was Sunday, I knew, by the clanging of the dissonant bells with which you herald your periodical fits of devotion; and Sunday breakfasts, as I learnt later, are a favourite form of distraction with such men as these amongst whom I had fallen.

The guests were waiting for their host; and the silver dishes were still covered.

They were talking of the previous night at the Coronet.

'Safe to run,' said one, in whom I recognised Paget Desmond. 'Ought to make money by it?'

'Humph!' said Derry Denzil, who was there without his big dog.

'What do you mean by that, Derry?' asked another, a slender, fair languid man, whom they all called Ned, and whom I found was, in rank, Earl of Guilliadene.

'Paper!' returned Denzil briefly, with much scorn.

'Paper? O, hang it, no! Stalls were full of fellows one knows; and the private-box women were all in good form.'

Denzil laughed grimly.

'Well—don't you know how she does it, Ned?'

'She? Not an idea!' replied the Earl,

'I'll tell you, then. Nine-tenths of those men get her pass—get it all through the season, and, when she takes her benefit, what charming big cheques the lovely Laura receives as a quid pro quo! House is full: she explains to her friend that it's all orders; he believes her; so it is in a sense; only the money that should have gone in at his box-office goes instead at the end of the season to her. Thing is perfectly simple. You see?'

'I can't say I do exactly,' muttered the fair earl. 'Old Wynch must know?'

'Of course old Wynch knows. But when it suits his own book to net gains in like manner, of course it don't pay him to check hers. Besides they understand one another; and Wynch is a wise man in his generation. He knows that she'll be worth her ten thousand a-year for a very much longer spell than Beltran will.'

'She don't do anything except those breakdowns,' murmured Lord Guilliadene. 'I'd get a score just as good as she out of Holborn Casino any night.'

'That's nonsense,' said Denzil calmly, 'She's the hand-

somest creature about the town. I hate her, but I must admit that. Besides, you know old George made her the fashion.'

'O, she's *chic;* if the clubs saying so can make her so—'

'As of course they can,' cried Paget Desmond. 'No woman can hold her own against the clubs for any length of time. You remember Mrs. D'Eyncourt? Well, that woman was superb; and a wonderfully fine actress too; but you know she was confoundedly honest, and had awfully queer notions; and when old Beaujolais enclosed her a set of diamonds she sent them back—sent them back, by Jove! as if he'd been a pot-boy offering her a pennyworth of periwinkles. Beau, you know, never forgave it, and he got her talked down in the clubs and other places till she hadn't a ghost of a chance. She was a very plucky woman, fearfully plucky woman; and thought she was strong enough to beat him. But of course she wasn't; of course she went to the wall. She was fairly driven off the London stage, you remember?'

'Yes,' added Mark Mountmorris, a man in the 9th Lancers, 'and I saw her stitching shirts as hard as ever she could sew, in a little garret window, in a beggarly German town. That's always the way women come to grief if they defy clubs—'

'And diamonds!' concluded Derry Denzil, with that laugh which was too grim for his handsome sun-browned features.

'Well—Pearl will never sin that way,' said the narrator of Mrs. D'Eyncourt's misfortunes and mistakes. 'Day before yesterday she came to muffin-worry in Fred Orford's rooms—you know he always has a lot of women in at five o'clock—well, he'd just been getting things at the Brialmont sale; china chiefly, and some queer old Moyen-age jewelry; and it had all come in from Christie's, and was lying about there loose. He didn't offer her a thing, on my soul he didn't, for I was there and heard every word he said; but—the deuce!—if she didn't ask for all the Saxe and Sèvres that took her fancy, and carried the best of 'em off with her before Fred had got a word in edgeways! He was awfully savage; the best of it was, too, that he'd promised all the Saxe cups and saucers to the Duchess de Vistaherilla, and he has had to write Lord knows what lies to account to her for 'em as broken!'

'I wish she'd come to my rooms, and asked me for my bronzes,' said Denzil, with a curt significance that suggested the reception which the freebooter would receive among his Antiques and Barbédiennes. 'Don't you think you were dreaming, Mount, when you fancied you saw Mrs. D'Eyncourt in Germany? Germany too! Such an indefinite word; you forget we've left one Teutonic Empire behind, and haven't yet come up with another.'

'I *did* see her,' said Mountmorris decidedly. 'Saw her in a beastly little place off Homburg. One knows *that* woman in a second just by the way her head's set on her shoulders. If she hadn't been a fool and sent back old Beau's diamonds, she'd have been—'

'When was it you saw her?'

'Deuce! I don't remember,' answered Lord Mark. 'Yes—stop—last autumn surely. I recollect now, because I'd lost over a monkey at Homburg, and was dead lame for want of remittances, and had nothing to do except go mooning about. I wonder *you* don't know what's become of her. You admired her awfully when she first came out. Always were about with her too.'

'She was a very good actress,' said Denzil briefly; and said no more.

'Yes, she was,' said Beltran, at that moment entering from his bedroom. 'What did that woman disappear for, Derry? It was a mystery to me at the time.'

'No mystery at all. Beaujolais had her run down, I believe.'

'O, nonsense! That wasn't it all. Beau can do a good deal, and kill an actress with a sneer as well as anybody; but he couldn't drive a woman away out of the world, and make her vanish into space as she vanished. I always thought *you* were at the bottom of that?'

'Did you? It's four years at least since Gertude D'Eyncourt left the stage; how should one remember anything about her? It's time enough to welcome and bury twenty Rachels; and she wasn't a Rachel by a very long way.

'Perhaps not. But she was in thorough-bred form always and a very good actress too. Where's that brute, by the way?'

'Her husband? I don't know.'

'You *used* to know all about them, Derry?

'Of course I did. But I've lost sight of them both long ago. You hear what Mount says, he saw her stitching shirts near Frankfort. That's later news than any of mine.'

He spoke indifferently, but his face grew a little paler under its bronzed tinting, and he dashed a good stoup of brandy into his breakfast glass of seltzer.

'She was very good actress. I wish the Coronet had her,' said Beltran meditatively, tossing me a plover's wing. The attention drew all eyes on me; and they recognised me with one voice.

'Yes, it's Laura's dog,' he answered them. 'I picked him up in the street last night. I've half a fancy to keep him.'

'She'll weep her eyes out for him,' said Denzil curtly, 'unless you find him worth thirty guineas!'

'O, we'll square it, of course,' said Beltran, with a touch of annoyance. I'll send her that pink Dresden tea-set there that she's longing for; it's worth twice as much as the dog. I don't think she'll mind the exchange; it'll be a good one for her, as the little beggar only cost her a sovereign.'

'How did Jacobs let him go for that?'

'She didn't get him of Jacobs.'

'O, didn't she? Well, I saw the very model of him there a month ago, only with a sooty coat instead of a snowy one.'

But Beltran was not attending and missed the hint conveyed to him.

For myself I nearly wagged my tail off with gladness at the prospect of escape from the Pearl's brodequin-kicks and parasol blows.

Emotions are quite as detrimental to a dog's tail as they are to a lady's complexion. Joseph Buonaparte's American wife said to an American gentleman, whom I heard quote her words, that she 'never laughed because it made wrinkles;' there is a good deal of wisdom in that cachinnatory abstinence. There is nothing in the world that wears people (or dogs) so much as feeling of any kind, tender, bitter, humoristic, or emotional.

How often you commend a fresh-coloured matron with

her daughters, and a rosy-cheeked hunting squire in his saddle, who, with their half-century of years, yet look so comely, so blooming, so clear-browed, and so smooth-skinned. How often you distrust the weary delicate creature, with the hectic flush of her rouge, in society; and the worn, tired, colourless face of the man of the world who takes her down to dinner. Well, to my fancy, you may be utterly wrong. An easy egotism, a contented sensualism, may have carried the first comfortably and serenely through their bank-note-lined paradise of common-place existence. How shall you know what heart-sickness in their youth, what aching desires for joys never found, what sorrowful power of sympathy, what fatal keenness of vision, have blanched their faded cheek, and lined the weary mouth of the other twain?

The breakfast was a long but by no means tedious affair. There were curious old wines and quite new dishes to be tried; and with the due leisure taken over these, and some pauses betwixt them, filled up by music from Denzil and a magnificent buffo singer of the Blues, who amused their minds with trying over a new score of an unpublished comic-opera lent him by its French composer, the hours from noon till four o'clock sped away with sufficient rapidity; in a dusky atmosphere of aromatic smoke, through which the singers' clear full notes came oddly, like a carillon ringing through a misty Flemish dawn.

'That's a capital opera,' said Beltran musingly, as Denzil's hand crashed out a lusty riotous chorus from the big Kirkmann. 'Who'll do it?'

'O, it's written for Schentach, of course,' said the player, naming a famous French songstress. 'They are keeping it for next New year.'

'What if one had it at the Coronet?—bringing Schentach over of course.'

'Good gracious! aren't you near enough ruin already? Schentach refused half-a-million francs a-month from the Sultan last week.'

'And she's an ugly woman,' said Beltran, contentedly resigning his idea in its birth. 'But we must do something; an everlasting breakdown, and an eternity of negro melodies, is not a very lively prospect.'

'Pays,' said Denzil curtly, with a crash of the chords.

'Does it? Ask old Wynch.'

'Ask an auditor at the year's end,' responded the other with brief significance.

Beltran blew away a ring of smoke.

'Couldn't do that. Wynch would think one suspected him.'

'The best thing he could think.'

'I don't fancy so. Trust people wholly or not at all.'

'An excellent rule. But why do you never practice but the first half of it!

'Go on playing, Derry, that chorus is charming; but it seems to me that I've heard something very like it before. It's the same measure as the old *Rataplan*.'

'Of course it is. It's borrowed body and soul. The originality of men and monkeys is only variations upon imitations.'

'Don't get epigrammatic in the daytime. There's a season for all things; and you're not writing musical critiques for the *Mouse*.'

'By the way, did you see that poem in this week's number? It's out of the *Mouse's* line utterly.'

'A poem! Never read one.'

'Well, read that. It has a kind of grandeur in it, and is worth something.'

'Do you mean "Demeter"?'

'Yes. It's only a fragment.'

Beltran stretched his hand for the paper, glanced through it while Denzil and the guardsman recommenced their duo from the sparkling Frenchman's score.

Beltran began to read indifferently, but with more gravity and interest as he proceeded. The verse occupied about a column and a half of the *Mouse's* thick toned paper. He threw it aside a little wearily when he had ended.

'Is your sixpenny sheet going to make us think? I claim my back subscription.'

'Don't you like the thing?'

'Like it? Pooh! One likes a burlesque, a pigeon-match, an American oyster, a number of the *Mouse*. One doesn't like *Samson Agonistes* or *Prometheus Unbound*.'

'You class that bit with the latter?'

'Pretty nearly. It is crude, indeed, and overwrought,

but it has the conflict of strength and suffering in it that they have. The idea of putting such a poem as that pell-mell in your pot-pourri of nonsense verses, club-scandals, whipped-cream wit, sublime self-sufficiency, and fashionable philistinism! It is to place a chained god in a smoking-room—a fallen Titan at an Arlington whist-table. For heaven's sake, since you must be court-jesters, don't fetter a desert-chief beside you to make your motley fouler. Be consistent, even in your foolery.'

Denzil laughed, leaning over the piano.

'Come, the poem's done something. It's made you say actually what you think for once! Don't you want to know who wrote it?'

'No, indeed. When I was a boy—strong on such matters—I traced so many philosophers into snuffy back parlours, and discovered so many philomels in curl-papers, that I never feel the faintest tinge of curiosity in literary personalities.'

'Who did write it, Derry?' asked the guardsman, looking over the verse with a mixture of good-natured wonder and contempt, just touched with a vague admiration.

'Well,' answered Denzil slowly, striking some wistful, solemn, minor chords with his left hand as he spoke. 'You see the name there, Harold Gerant. It's not a feigned name, as you're thinking. The manuscript came to little Lance just twelve months ago; was put aside and forgotten. A week or two since I lit on it, in looking over old copy that was to be burnt. I thought I saw stuff in it, and told him to put it in type. The address on the page was a street in Whitefriars. I wrote there, and had no answer. I asked some publishers if they knew the name; one of them told me it belonged to a boy who was always pestering them to accept his rubbish. They had a consummate scorn for him: he asked them for no money, only begged they would print what he wrote. I found out the place yesterday, quite by chance. The people of the house said a lad of that name had lived with them three or four weeks, but had gone out one day and had never returned. Some dozen days after his disappearance a body had been found in the Thames, at low water, just beneath Westminster-bridge. They had gone to see it, and had recognised it by the long fair curling hair. The features had been difigured

beyond all knowledge by striking on the piles of the bridge. That is the history of the poet of "Demeter." He will not make us think any more.'

There was a long silence as the deep soft tones of his voice died down; not one of those present spoke.

At last Beltran raised himself, and looked at the Dresden clock.

'Five, as I live! Stay here as long as you like. I must go and see half-a-dozen women over their tea. Remember, we dine at Richmond. I will call for you, Derry, at your rooms, before I drive round to take up Laura.'

And he went to change his velvet attire, that he might carry no odour of Turkish tobacco into the dainty patrician boudoirs, where they were never at home on the seventh day to anything over a dozen.

I thought how heartless he was.

Denzil remained alone after the rest of the Sunday breakfast-party had departed.

He did not rise from the deep-seated chair in which he had sat as he played through the last bars of the opera; he did not relight his cigar, which had gradually died out from his inattention; his face was very grave, very dark, very melancholy, now that he deemed himself in solitude.

'Working—starving, perhaps—in a foreign land. My God!' he muttered once, unconsciously aloud. And then he started up, and paced to and fro the two chambers with swift uneven steps, and with his head bent on his chest in depth of thought.

Once he went to a portfolio of photographs that leaned against the wall, and drew one of the great sheets out, and placed it upright, and gazed at it; his eyes shaded with his hand.

It was only the head of a woman; a very noble head, standing out like a cameo from a black background of shadow.

He looked at it long; so long that in the wavering light of a London sunset, that glowed through the misty close of the day, the great soft eyes seemed to gleam and change, and the curling proud lips to move and breathe. It seemed a living thing to me; and I think it did so to him also.

Then he flung it back with nervous force amongst the rest in the portfolio, and throwing himself again into the

chair buried his face in his hands, and sat immoveable; while the quarters chimed again and again from the clock on the mantelpiece and the church belfry in the street without.

The opening of the inner door, as the servants, supposing all the gentlemen had left, entered to clear away the breakfast service, aroused him; and he rose and went:—if his eyes had not been wet with tears I never saw human tears on earth. And, having lived but a short life, I yet have seen them often.

An hour or two later, when Beltran had again entered and again gone forth, as I looked from one of the windows to divert my loneliness, I saw him dash past in his mail-phaeton driving two sorrels tandem, with two grooms riding after him. Beside him sat Laura Pearl, in all the splendour that gold broidered cashmeres and genuine ermine could give; and behind them, leaning over and laughing with a cigar in his mouth, was Deringham Denzil.

I began to suspect that men were very different in society and in privacy.

CHAPTER XV.

HIS FIRST SEASON.

THE transfer of the pink Dresden for myself was, I believe, satisfactorily effected; for that particular set of china disappeared, and I remained undisturbed in Beltran's possession, and speedily became a favourite with him.

I had a very agreeable life. His two servants, being devoted to him, were very good to me. There was no one to tease me; and, as there were a great many people always coming and going in his rooms, I seldom was without amusement. There were men breakfasts and men dinners often in these pretty costly chambers of his, that had as many treasures in them as Christie's itself on a view-day.

In the mornings, artists, and authors, and guardsmen, and diplomatists, and pretty actresses, and witty dramatic adapters, and all sorts and kinds of people would get to-

gether in the rooms, whether Beltran were there or not—some looking in for two minutes, some staying two hours. In the late afternoon, not rarely there would come some fair friends or relatives of his own caste: dainty haughty women, who would have their five-o'clock tea out of his egg-shell china, and talk scandal with the most charming air in the world, and feast me on muffins and sugar; his servant being always at the doorway on guard, so that no member of the Pearl order, or female aspirant to the boards of the Coronet, should be admitted whilst these noble dames and delicate damsels drank their orange-pekoe, glanced over the bric-à-bric, and talked the last news of the day.

He very often, also, as I say, gave dinners in his rooms; for they were large, and the cook downstairs was one of the finest in London. And whenever men did dine with him there was sure to follow gold-crown whist, with heavy betting on the tricks, or, more generally still, some game of quick hot hazard.

Taken as a whole, the mode of life was bewilderingly brilliant to me; and with a week or two of it—being sugar-plummed by the actresses, praised and patted by the great ladies, and highly favoured by my noble owner—I utterly forgot the episode of poor Bronze, and had—alas! I shame to write it—very nearly ceased to regret Reuben Dare.

I soon, indeed, became really attached to my new master and all his friends. They were 'thorough-bred' to the core.

You object to that word? You think I am wedded to an order? *Fi-donc!*—how you always misappreciate your greatest instructors!

Have I not shown you how I could love and honour a simple unlettered north-country quarryman?

He was a gentleman in his own way, my poor gentle-hearted Ben; for he was loyal, and incapable of a lie, and tender of soul to women, and without one shadow of falsehood, or of pretension, on his honest life. And he had in a manner a right to be so by race as well; for Trust (who was an antiquary in his fashion) used often to tell that, in the old old times, when there were yeomen in England, and the stout handbow was the terror of all her foreign foes, the Dares were stalwart and sturdy northmen, who rode out with the Peverills, and with the Vernons after them, and struck many a fair blow, and sped many a straight arrow,

and tilled many a broad acre, in that old dim time; though, during the long passage of the centuries, their sons' sons had fallen to a low estate, and become one with the hinds who sowed for other men's reaping, and garnered for other men's feasts.

In truth, too, despite all the fine chances that you certainly give your peasants to make thorough beasts of themselves, they and your real aristocrats, have the only really good manners in your country. In an old north-country dame, who lives on five shillings a week, in a cottage like a dream of Teniers' or Van Tol's, I have seen a fine courtesy, a simple desire to lay her best at her guests' disposal, a perfect composure, and a freedom from all effort, that were in their way the perfection of breeding. I have seen these often in the peasantry—in the poor. It is your middle classes, with their incessant flutter, and bluster, and twitter, and twaddle; with their perpetual strain after effect; with their deathless desire to get one rung of the ladder higher than they ever can get; with their preposterous affectations, their pedantic unrealities, their morbid dread of remark, their everlasting imitations, their superficial education, their monotonous common-places, and their nervous deference to opinion. It is your middle classes that have utterly destroyed good manners, and have made the prevalent mode of the day a union of boorishness and servility, of effervescence and of apathy—a court suit, as it were, worn with muddy boots and a hempen shirt.

And I am terribly afraid that this will only get worse and worse. The elegance of the aristocracy, and the simplicity of the peasantry, are alike being swept away; and there looms in the distance of your future only one awful mass of hurry, ignorance, ostentation, frivolity, and barbarous rudeness which, styling itself Society, shall only be—a Mob.

If I am too discursive, pardon me; I have lived a good deal amongst women, and may have caught up their habit of leading a discussion on the Neo-Platonics round to Valenciennes edging, and branching off from the New Comtist doctrines to the crack in their old Worcester card-bowl.

All women talk discursively; in your stupid ones it is an awful bore, but in your really clever women it is charming;—that bird-like flitting over the deepest of waters may be done with an *infinite* grace, and sometimes your bird will bring

you a pearl that all the deep divers have missed. The 'felicitous surprise' is, I believe, one of the greatest charms in your laws of rhetoric; and no one deals in this more than does the woman of quick talent and of facile tongue, in her gay vagaries which will in their most erratic moments still keep some method in their madness.

I liked my new owner, as I have said, very quickly; and I liked all his friends and companions—the 'swells,' as your snobs *will* call them, the men with the pale handsome faces, borne by crusaders and cavaliers before them; the men with the gentle quiet ways, and the contemptuous ring in their voices, and the easy indolent insolence to all forms of pretension; and the frank, kindly generous hearts for those that know them well; and the manner that is so natural to them, yet which no outsider can imitate—the manner that varies so little in love or in fury, in pleaure or pain.

It is the fashion to rail at them nowadays; but that invective has a good deal of cant and a good deal of envy in it—ay, even envy of such slight things as the accent of their voices!—and, like all cant and all envy, it is a true child of the Father of Lies.

I who write, have I not been purchased by their money and made captive to their power? And is there any crucial test to tell you a man of breeding like the manner in which he will treat a thing that lies in his power? Well—I, who thus have opportunity of examination and judgment passing the common rule, do affirm that in all which makes a man loyal, brave, patient, and of high honour, frank of speech, honest of thought, faithful in word to friend or foe, without self-consciousness in distinction, and without complaint or self-pity in adversity, I have never known the equal of your English gentlemen.

And I have been with them in their dark hours and their gay hours; I have seen them in their weal and their woe. Ah! those men amongst you whom you only behold staking their money on their cards, lounging down their club steps, smoking their cigars in all the capitals, and swearing good-humouredly in all the languages of Europe; those men with their dainty blossoms in their button-holes, and their careless fashionable jargon on their lips, and their pleasant indifferent laugh at all created things, and their easy languid philosophy that holds as its first thesis that nothing on earth

ever matters, I know them better than you—I know what tempests of tragedy have broken over their heads, what deathbeds they have watched with agony in their souls, what whirlwinds of passion have shaken them for women fair and false, what capacities of quick and true sympathy lie in them to start to life at the tone of a voice that they love.

I know; you do not. But you may believe me—the knightly soul is no more dead than in the old days of Holy Grail; the wild reiver still grows reverent to true innocence as in the days of Astolat; the gallant heart still beats to passion and remorse, still thrills with pity and with pardon, even as in the time of Lancelot and of Arthur.

You judge these men from the externals of their lives; they in the fashion of the day like well that you should deem the worst of them; they wear the habit of a negligent indifference, as their fathers wore the helm and the hauberk of steel; what do you know of them in their best hours? In the moments when their voice trembles on a woman's ear with a word, spoken amidst a crowd, that is for ever a farewell; when their heads are low bent to take a dying mother's blessing; when their eyelids are wet as they look at the green grave of an old dead comrade; when their very souls are riven, as the oak in storm, as they sit in the still grey dawn, and think—and think—and think—of the woman whom they have learned to speak of as a jest, yet who lay for a while in their bosom, only to flee from them in cruel craven treachery, and leave, as legacy in her stead, bitter despair and utter unbelief.

Allons! You will say I cannot be a dog of the world if I allow serious thought, or sad memories, to steal over me. Let me hark back to my recollection of the happy time that followed my discovery by Vere Essendine under the portico of his theatre.

Beltran was not a very good man, as the world counts goodness. He was indolent; he was contemptuous; he had very little respect for women, which indeed, was, I think, their own fault; he had the half-sad, half-slighting scepticism of his period: and he held that there was nothing on earth in the least worth making a fuss about. But he was always kind of heart; sincere in an unusual degree; just in action whenever he troubled himself to act; and of a very great delicacy and generosity towards those who needed his assistance. In truth, he gave away far more than most

ostentatious benefactors of their species expend, only that he did all his gentler and better deeds in darkness, and was more irritated if a charity was traced to him than if a hundred vices were laid at his doors.

And the world did indeed abuse him very badly. To be sure, he had been rich when he had succeeded to his title, and had managed by this time to throw away almost everything he had ever possessed; and this is a sin of which society is always very intolerant. To jeopardise your power to give it good dinners is always an eighth cardinal sin in its sight.

Besides, Beltran was a man whom the world feminine had always found it impossible to marry; and there were many bitter things said of him in the boudoir and drawing-room. For this he cared very little; he went his own ways; spent much time in travelling and yachting; preferred the *demi-monde* to any other female world; and having some half-dozen friends passionately devoted to him, was disliked, though deferred to, by most others who knew him.

'Lord! if that's a lord, I wish the land was chuck full of lords,' said a brute of a bargeman once on a dark misty night. There had been a collision on the Thames between his coal barge and a naphtha laden brig, and one man, coming down from a yacht lying at anchor in safety, had plunged amongst the crashing timbers and the blazing waters, and fought with the hideousness of that double death, until he brought out from the crushed and smoking cabin of the barge two little drowning children whom the river was choking, and the flames were straining to devour, in their sleep—brought them unhurt, golden and white and rosy, amidst all that wreck and deluge.

Their father, the coal bargee, had been a virulent agitator amongst his own kind—a fierce sullen demagogue of pot-houses and coaling-stations, inveighing against the cursed aristocrats with savage fury. But when he saw those two little curly heads raised in safety through the blinding water and the hissing fires, he shook like a shot-stuck elephant, and groaned aloud.

As for Beltran, he only laughed a little—very quietly, they say, though his loins were scorched and blackened by the smoke, and his left arm had been dislocated by a blow from the shiverings timbers.

'That sort of thing is easy enough,' was all he answered to the wild plaudits round him. 'Don't worry, please. Nothing's worth a fuss.'

The bargee from that hour adored him, and narrated the tale in those places wherein he had been previously wont to thunder forth his foul invective against the 'nobles.' The history bridged class hatred, as that poisonous gulf could not have been bridged by sentimental socialism cast as a sop to Cerberus.

Beltran had done better for his order in this demagogue's sight than if he had gone up on the wings of a bribed-for, lied-for, and truckled-for 'people's confidence,' into the lath-and-plaster temples of 'office.'

Dogs never have any difficulty in remembering the slightest event or the lightest word that has ever occurred or was ever spoken in their presence. Our power of memory is something marvellous. It is to the human mind as the inscriptions on the Pyramids, that never wear out, are to the lines in your modern tombstones, that a few years efface.

No doubt the shortness of your memories is a very convenient thing for you; for without it I really don't know how you could have the conscience to repudiate your debts, swear in your witness-boxes, take your marriage vows, traverse your divorce petitions, or do half the thing that you *do* do.

But, owing to the perfection of *our* remembrance, I can recall every trifle of the life that I then enjoyed with my new master. He generally took me with him in his pocket, and I saw a great deal of life in that manner. You think a pocket is a circumscribed sphere of observation? Nay, not more so than a club window.

Besides, we get out of the pocket, and run about hither and hither. But you, how few of you ever move out of the circle of thought in your club!

It was a pleasant, idle, artistic, amusing season that had commenced with me in Beltran's ownership. Noons spent at Christie's, or Philips', where one could hear a prime minister set his soul on a small bit of old Chelsea, and see a cabinet of Marie Antoinette's knocked down to a Jew appraiser; could behold the collections of a lifetime sentenced to the hammer by a thankless heir, and a courtesan's priceless jewels be received by and bought in for duchesses, is as complete and caustic a satire upon Life as one can want to enjoy on a sunny spring morning.

Half-hours passed in the odorous cedar-lined studios of fashionable artists, with the smoke of choice cigars curling round antiques and bric-à-brac, and the sherry and seltzer hissing in long fairy-like glasses of Venice; where art critics fondly conceited that the luxury of a Rubens must mean the genius of a Rubens likewise, and gave the R.A.'s ill-scumbled and over-glazed portrait of some patrician beauty credit for a 'depth' and a 'tone' that existed alone in the hue and the taste of his clarets.

Sunday afternoons idled agreeably away under the limes and acacias on the smooth sunny lawn of some fair singer's or actress's toy villa by the Thames, with chit-chat and ices, pretty women and tea, the newest flowers, and the flower of news. Sunday dinners at some dame's of the high world, with six or eight guests at the utmost, of people perfectly suited; and with the *chasse* lightly followed by some few bits of music or song, of an exquisite choice and of a faultless execution—some exhumed glee of Arne, some unknown morsel of Schubert, some plaintive passionate love-lay of Gounod.

Mornings passing to and fro in the ride with a cigar in his mouth and a rosebud in his coat, and a glossy sorrel neck curved delicately under the light caress of his whip. Minutes checking the hack under the trees, and casting the cigar to the winds of heaven, to hold in soft murmured converse some patrician coquette with proud blue Plantagenet eyes, or some witching head of a foreign legation with a name out of the Libro d'Oro of mediæval Europe.

Hours, still termed 'morning' though at sunset, taking his drag down the Mile, with his wild chestnut team fretting and flinging as though curb had never galled, nor ribbon ever controlled them; while aloft upon the box some duchess of *demi-monde* avenged with reckless rein the *lése majesté* to her order of the noontide intrigue in Rotten-row.

Suppers where nothing was eaten, but five pounds a head was paid for looking at some flowers and hearing some champagne corks drawn, and tasting some half-a-dozen grapes or a slice of water-melon. Suppers where, after opera, or theatre, great ladies in their paint and pearls would insist on being taken into grated galleries in forbidden places, to make a fast of feasting on stout and cheese and pickles; or suppers where, after opera or theatre, casino celebrities, late

maids-of-all-work, would insist on being taken into gilded chambers in grand hotels to make a farce of scorning comet wines and hot-house pine apples.

In all these I was often his companion, going into a very small compass, being swift of foot after his horse, though so small, and being a favourite with all women, save one, for my beauty, my curls, and my tricks

Nay, he being influential and I infinitesimal, I even went into the clubs with him; and I learned to look out of the windows in Pall-mall and St. James's-street with quite as sapient and supercilious an air as any club *habitué* could desire. I was very quick to hear, and observe too, the remarks that they made there, and the contempt or interest, as it might hap, with which they lifted their eye-glasses at the women passing without,

Indeed, I became so accomplished in discernment that I turned up my nose at a hired brougham and job horse, though the prettiest creature sat behind the shabby panels; and cocked my ears and wagged my tail at a well-appointed equipage, though rouged and brazen audacity lolled on its cushions; doing these with a power of selection that proved me to have become, in a month or two, a consummate dog of the world.

As for my first initiator, Fanfreluche, I soon began to feel the polite disdain for her as 'only a woman,' that your youngster, who had been three months in the Guards, feels for the kindly coquette and 'frisky matron' who took him up on his first introduction into society, and put him in the right set, and got him into the right clubs, and gave him a nook in her opera-box, and a word at her parties, when nobody else noticed the fledgling.

My days and nights passed in a perpetual round of sweetmeats, antics, ladies' kisses, mischief, mirth, and dainty dishes. When I thought of poor Ben's cottage, and old Trust's dinner of crusts and oatmeal, I shame to say I thought of them with wondering scorn. There were people and dogs who lived like that, and never knew the taste of a truffle or the look of whitebait. Of course I entirely forgot that the time had been—a few weeks before—when to myself also truffles and whitebait had been names unknown; but persuaded myself, till I ended in believing, that I had fed on nothing else all the days of my life.

What hypocrites you call them, those pretty 'outsiders,' who, brought from obscurity into riches and pleasure, will talk as if they had been great ladies all their lives long!

Now, judging them by myself, I have little doubt they are partially sincere. When we like a climate we get acclimatised very soon, and when we detest our birth-place we cannot have any pangs of nostalgia. Now, they do both of these; and when they try to talk you into the idea that they were born in purples, believe me they have first induced themselves to believe the thing they wish.

'And ye shall walk in silken tire,' seems to every woman so inevitable a law of her being, that she will forget that the time ever existed when she transgressed it in homespun.

Fanfreluche I saw occasionally, meeting her in a walk, or at such times as Beltran took me with him to the Pearl's house. But there was a coolness between us, owing to her supposing that I had fallen out of the brougham on purpose, and planned to be picked up as I had been; a mean imagination, consequent on the intrigues and deceptions that were her daily atmosphere, which I resented too much to explain away.

Bigger creatures than I have sulked a true friendship into its death by torpor, from being too obstinate and full of pride to clear aside a wrongful supposition. Ah, good people, take my advice: be as careful in choosing your friendship as in choosing new blood for your hound kennels; but when once your choice has been made, slay the hydra of your *amour propre* seventy times over, rather than let it live and grow and stand like a monster of darkness, between you and your chosen friend.

The fact was, too, that Fanfreluche loved Beltran with all that curious force which your cynical, worldly-wise coquettes can sometimes throw into an attachment; and the poor little satirist was jealous of my place in those pleasant chambers. I saw this, but I did not pity it. It was very sweet to my feelings that I, the baby and little fool as she called me, should have thus prospered and distinguished myself at a bound, while this Rochefoucault on four legs, this female Juvenal in a blue jacket, had been left to the caprices of a dancer of breakdowns. This feeling was a small one; I know it, but I think I have seen something like it in humanity.

She laughed grimly when she heard the tale.

'So Beltran purchases a burlesque in good faith for two-fifty; and the Mouse spends the money in trying to divert Laura's fealty; and Beltran gives a thirty-pound bit of china for a puppy his traitor bought for a song; and the Mouse daren't say anything because he knows he was guilty; and Laura nets sheer profits from both sides, and cheats them both in the long run. Well, it is neat certainly.'

But though she thus grimaced and jeered at it, it was evidently very bitter and unwelcome to her that this singular turn of good fortune should have befallen myself and not her, and that the pink tea-set should have bought me back in her place.

On Mrs. D'Eyncourt accordingly she would at first vouchsafe me no information; 'the D'Eyncourt was before her time,' she averred, though I believe on my soul she knew all about the affair, whatever it might have been.

'She was an actress, wasn't she?' I asked.

'O yes; an actress of genius, I have heard.'

'And has disappeared?'

'My dear, everybody has "disappeared" who isn't starring and staring before the world's footlights. We are uncommonly fond of our celebrities,—O yes,—we buy their photographs and steal their characters with the greatest ardour imaginable. We are always flinging flowers before them, and throwing stones after them, with the most affectionate energy possible. But it's only while they're in the range of our eyesight. If they retire, or pause, or only get sick for a little, we've done with them. Your statesman may have overworked his brain in your service; your painter may have paralysis, your author may have gone to his *otium cum dignitate*, and your actress may have married or be a-dying; —it's all the same; they have disappeared, and the world thinks no more about them.'

'But this woman—'

'This woman was a great fool, I believe. She had no money; she had a blackguard for a husband; she had nothing but her talents; and she gave herself the airs of a duchess.'

'She was a gentlewoman, perhaps?'

'What has that to do with it? She had no money, I tell you. Birth without gold is a fine-feathered bird, with both his pinions cropped off close at the point. Much use his

plumage is! and fine fat worms he'll pick up in the morning!'

'But she was surely right to send back that old nobleman's diamonds?'

'O yes—and so wise, my dear! You see; here is Laura with one little green beetle for her hair worth its two thousand guineas, and this D'Eyncourt woman stitching shirts in an attic in Germany as you tell me.'

'A woman should not sell her soul for a—'

'Beetle? As good as anything else if it's in fashion. A scarabeus at two thousand guineas, and a shirt at seven brass groschen,—I'm much obliged to you for that pat illustration.'

And I could not get any more out of her, for she trotted off with her nose in the air to where Laura Pearl's pony carriage stood by the rails in the bright noon of the now budding spring season.

I was only being aired by the valet whilst Beltran himself was attending a private view of some foreign pictures.

By the way, *apropos* of valets, let me say a word on your servants.

Beltran's man was an excellent fellow; but as a rule, I do think the class of body servants is the most detestable class in the universe. How you allow their snobbism, their affectations, their impudence, their ignorance, and their general offensiveness, as you do, is one of those things that no dog can understand.

You go and laugh at Charles Surface's valet on the stage, as though his ridiculous impertinence had no parallel in your own attendants and as though in appearance, at least, the 'gentleman's gentleman' of that generation were not a million times better than the wretched cad in his cut-away coat and chimney-pot hat, whom you call 'servant.' Jeames, in his powder and plush, may be bad enough; but I vow that your 'own man' is ten thousand times worse. The former does, at least, by his garb and often by his manners, show what station he fills; but the latter looks only like some member of the swell-mob, and very often scarce behaves any better.

I suppose he has virtues in your eyes. I suppose he can be trusted to compound honey-and-ink boot-varnish; he can be trusted never to put an evening flower in your morning-coat or *vice versâ;* he can be trusted to make a brandy-smahs

perhaps, not half-badly; he can be trusted, when he takes four notes of appointments to four different ladies, not to beget eternal confusion by leaving them variously in the wrong places; he can also, maybe, be trusted not to tell the maid attendant on that patrician dame with whom you play at platonics so pleasantly, of that small villa amongst the Kingston woods, where you pursue another form of worship.

He may have all these virtues—or you think he has them—but what others he has you would be puzzled indeed to say. On my word, I hardly know which is the worst 'form' out—your familiar friendship with the blackguards of the turf when you want them to give you a 'straight tip;' or your familiar association with the over-dressed, moustached, impudent, pretentious cads who pocket your fifty or sixty sovereigns a-year for the trouble they take in smoking your cigars, reading your letters, riding your horses, assisting your intrigues, and imitating your vices.

You are given, very continually, to denouncing or lamenting the gradual encroachment of mob-rule. But, alas! whose fault, pray, is it that bill-discounters dwell as lords in ancient castles; that money-lenders reign over old, time-honoured lands; that low-born hirelings dare to address their master with a grin and sneer, strong in the knowledge of his shameful secrets; and that the vile daughters of the populace are throned in public places, made gorgeous with the jewels which, from the heirlooms of a great patriciate, have fallen to be the gewgaws of a fashionable infamy?

Ah, believe me, an aristocracy is a feudal fortress which, though it has merciless beleaguers in the Jacquerie of plebeian Envy, has yet no foe so deadly as its own internal traitor of Lost Dignity!

CHAPTER XVI.

ROMANCES OF THE ROW.

One of my greatest pleasures were these mornings in the Row, when Beltran used to walk there in lieu of his usual noontide canter. At such times I would mount the chair beside him; and, sitting upright on that green iron throne, I passed the peripatetics in review with a counte-

nance that I was satisfied presented the most complete copy of the superciliousness, serenity, and sarcasm which I saw on the faces of those around me.

If there be a Republic on earth it is the Ride from twelve to two on a May morning.

O, I know it is the most fashionable lounge you have, but it is a Republic for all that! There could Bill Jacobs lean against a rail, with a clay-pipe in his mouth, and a terrier under his arm, close beside the Earl of Guilliadene, with his cigarette and his eye-glass, and his Poole-cut habiliments. There could Laura Pearl, or any other of her order, sit with their priceless old laces, and their skirts of satin or velvet, sweeping against the soft, white, filmy dress of a duke's child-like daughter, in her seventeenth year, and her very first season.

There Marmion Eagle, the handsome painter, who was the Wagner of Art, and had so much genius that no one dared to hang or to purchase his pictures, could place himself by a penny next to his forbidden love the wondrous-eyed Lady Gwendoline; and for one sweet half-hour forget that he was a madman, and she a great noble's betrothed. There Maud Delamere, wearing her gold-laden cashmere as none other did, could flirt away her pleasant morning, side by side with the great Duchess of Astolat; while the duchess, eyeing the shawl, would silently appraise the worth of the marvellous fabric, and honestly admire the beauty of the wearer, being herself the only person in all London who knew not that both cashmere and Delamere were as much the property of His Grace of Astolat as was his stud or kennel.

There could the tired shop-girl, escaped for an hour from the heated show-rooms on some thrice-blessed Belgravian errand, pause beneath the trees, and receive a fresh incentive to remain virtuous on ten shillings a-week by the sight of Lillian Lee, with her glistening chignon, and her velvet habit, and her jewelled whip, leaning down from her hundred-guinea hack to laugh with Lord Brune and Freddy Orford.

There also could the weary author, or the generous gentleman, whose brain was being maddened or whose heart was being broken by the curse of too much honour and too little gold, behold how great a thing it was to be a cheat;

as Fiodora, the great usurer, rode by on his black Arab; or the old withered yellow face of the unwedded capitalist, Baron Moresco, brought smiles to those fair patrician lips with which they never greeted mere wit or talent, blood or beauty, in the men who passed beside their chairs.

The Row surely is a Republic; for in it first come, first served; and a copper coin will throne alike the ambassadress and the traviata, the aristocrat and the cad, the creditor and the debtor. But all, still, are not equal, you object? Ah, bah! if that be your objection to a Republic, you had best remain a Conservative till the end of time.

On this common ground I met, as I have said, King Arthur, and Fanfreluche, and many other dogs of high rank and breeding who were wont, like myself, to saunter their mornings away in the Park.

Once also I saw Bronze—poor, patient, faithful Bronze. He was wandering wearily among that gay butterfly crowd, searching, searching, searching everywhere; on his endless and hopeless errand. A groom lashed him with his whip; a policeman kicked him away as a stray cur; Lillian Lee rode her horse viciously at him; Laura Pearl's page drove him with a curse from resting a moment under her carriage out of the scorch of the sun. And I—well!—I have promised you to be as honest as Jean Jacques—I, throned on my green chair, affected not to see him.

Partly, it was because I dreaded greatly to tell him that the boy Harold was dead, and that his quest was useless. Chiefly, I knew it was because a Countess, Beltran's sister, had spread her gold-broidered burnous for my throne, and the Astolat dog, the most supercilious of poodles, sat beside me; and with my snow-white curls, my gay blue ribbon, and the pretty arrogant air with which I had learned to cock my eye and lift my nose, I shrank from recognition of that dusty, tired, starving, homeless creature.

It was shameful, I knew; our race is scarcely ever tainted by such weaknesses; but, whilst you condemn me, think a moment,—are you eager to bow to a ruined man in the Row? Will you check your horse by the rails to smile on a poor relation? Will you shake hands in the face of the town with a penniless strolling artist in a linen blouse, and with a wooden pipe in his mouth, though you may know he has the genius of a Raphael and the heart of

a Francois d'Assise? No; ninety-nine out of a hundred of you won't. My false shame of poor Bronze has many analogies in your humanity.

Yet none the less did I feel remorse for it; we always do feel acute remorse whenever we descend to your level by wounding a friend, or by fawning on a foe. And I would fain have darted after him, and made full and instant amends for my wickedness, but, at the first motion that I gave, the Countess's little hand caught my collar, and held me motionless down on my seat.

It seemed indeed as though she had divined my intention; and felt that a display of friendship from Prosperity to Poverty would be an unseemly anomaly, unfit for that place of fair fashion.

I confessed my sin that day to Fanfreluche.

'Bless me, my dear!' said that cynic. 'You've no business to have learned your lesson so quick; you don't live with a woman!'

She had never recovered, nor was ever likely to recover, the sharp jealousy which she felt of my selection by her hero; but she had an excellent heart in her way, though such a bitter little thing, and she was often very good-natured indeed.

That day I coaxed out of her at last as much as she knew of that story of Derry Denzil's, which she had once promised, and always afterwards refused, to tell me.

He had just passed us, on his black mare, with his glass in his eye, and his cigarette in his mouth, and the sunshine full on his dark, handsome, reckless face.

'Story, my dear?' every one of those men has a story,' said Miss Volubility, when I reminded her of her promise. 'It makes me mad to hear that wretched Mouse, when he wants to slate a very good novel, declare that there is no romance in real life. Good gracious! Why, no novelist would dare to write half the things that I know have happened; the coincidences are too marvellous, the fates too bizarre, the anomalies too glaring, the skein of circumstances too entangled, in real life, for any novelists to dare to paint exactly all that they see or know.* Do all reviewers live in a nutshell, and absorb themselves in an

* I beg thoroughly to corroborate this opinion of Mdlle. Fanfreluche, whom I report faithfully, but with whom I do not always agree.—Ed.

eternity of knitting and muffins, and threepenny whist, that they persist in declaring there is no romance in real life? Heavens! the unutterable woe, the insane passions, the extraordinary contradictions, the horrible ruin, the wonderful accidents, forming themselves like a kaleidoscope picture, that I have beheld in my season of existence! The wildest novel was never one half so wild as the real fate of many a human life that to superficial eyes look serene, and placid, and uneventful enough. Life is just the same now, as in the ages of the Œdipus agony, and the Orestes crime. It is only that now—they show nothing.'

'But tell me what happened to him,' I urged, yawning a little.

'O, you little idiot!' she cried, disgusted. 'One would certainly think you were a woman—always staring at one little whelk on the shore, and always ignoring the whole great ocean and sky! The whelk is the one narrow personality; the waves and horizon are the vast expanse of universal circumstance.

'You are almost as bad as an English girl that I belonged to once for a few months. She was the wife of the great Belgian painter, Philip Cornaro; she was a pretty creature, with no brains. One glorious evening, down by the Biscay coast—they lived there at that time in an exquisite villa—he was painting out-of-doors; painting a great golden comet that floated over a purple sky, above a moonlit sea.

'The bells of a campanile rang eight and nine and ten; he painted on and on and on; and I sat quiet beside him. For there was a spell in this marvellous night, with that mystical messenger from the unknown gods to men waiting there, in the still starlit skies, above the hushed calm waters.

'The girl stole up beside us feverishly twice or thrice. At length, as the bells rang the tenth hour, she came again swiftly and shook him by the arm. He started—thus unwelcomely roused from out of his great mystic dreams.

"Come at once, Cornaro," she whispered; "I have waited so long—so long!"

'He roused himself with a sigh.

"I cannot come," he said patiently, gazing with his whole soul in his eyes, at the sea and the sky.

"Cannot! And why?" she cried in vexed wonder.

"Why?" he echoed, "look there, love—that splendour will never revisit the earth for five centuries."

'She pushed the brush from his hand with a pout on her ruddy lips.

"The comet! Who cares for that? you must come in. *The tea is getting cold!*"'

'And then people say that incompatibility of character is not reason enough for a divorce!' the duke's poodle added, as Fanfreluche paused in her long recital.

'Ah, they say so, Poodle,' that cynic responded. 'But nobody's ever proved it yet, I think.'

'This is not Denzil's story?' I urged, my mind curiously dwelling on Mrs. D'Eyncourt.

'He's fifty stories, my dear,' said Fanfreluche. 'They all of 'em have. Look there—do you see Peel Vavasour, that little, dry, slender chip of a man who is hardly bigger than his own fusee? Well, he's the hardest rider that ever sent a horse at a six-bar; and the boldest trooper that ever led his men into the jaws of hell. Yet do you know that, for ten whole years, that man has been given over, heart and body and soul, to the wildest, saddest, direst passion that ever possessed a life?

'See yonder too—on that sorrel hunter that is plunging and tearing at its bit—that is Sir George Maude of Effingham. Is he not your beau-idéal of a fair, frank, fearless, sunny-hearted English gentleman, with his golden beard blowing in the wind, and his blue eyes glancing in the light, and his manly laugh ringing out so cheerily? Well, my dear, go home with George, or rather go where he never goes, to that grand old Effingham in the western woods, by the western seas, that looks like Launcelot's ocean-castle; and you will find the picture of a woman there. A woman with Titian's hair and Boucher's velvet eyes, smiling; with a scarlet flower held against her lips, in a pretty unspoken symbolic "hush!" Well, that woman was George's wife.

'And the picture is locked in a darkened room, that never is opened, nor hears the fall of footsteps, nor sees the light of day. She had all his big, brave, kindly heart, and all his loyal undoubting honour. So she broke the one and betrayed the other. To do him the more shame, moreover, she chose her paramour out of his own kith and

kin. It was a horrible tale—of worse than passion, of worse than sin. George pursued them to Paris, and would have killed his cousin—strangled him by the sheer force of his hands—if the crowd in the Bois had not torn them asunder.

'He has been freed by the law, and the woman has wedded her lover. But the old halls of Effingham never see their master's face; the old forests never hear the ring of his rifle; no children's gay feet tread the grasses; no woman's glad voice wakes the echoes. And that man is haunted for ever, by a ghost that will never be laid.'

I answered nothing—these revelations saddened me.

'Look there again,' pursued this pseudo-philosopher. 'You see that cold, fair, sardonic-looking creature there, on a dark bay, wearing a rose in his coat, and riding with Paget Desmond? Well, that is Vivyan Bruce? He is a colonel of Guards, and in the Brigades they always call him Mephisto; while society in general is given to saying that if Satan himself does ever walk abroad in man's guise, he clothes himself in the fleshly garb of wicked Vy Bruce, who is the deadliest shot in all Europe, and the wildest gambler that ever shook a main. Well, do you know that there is a blind woman, still lovely even in her sightlessness, dwelling in the daintiest river-home by Cliefden, who could tell you that for tenderness, pitifulness, thoughtfulness, there is not the equal of "Mephisto" in the world. It was the old, old story, of sweet forbidden love, and lives that met too late. One terrible night she, young and beautiful, and weary of heart, for a love that never could be hers, standing beside her casement close by the gates of Frascati, was striken by a sudden stroke of lightning darting from above Albano, and made blind then and for ever. Her husband cursed her, and abandoned her; this man alone cleaved to her, and took her in her senselessness and sightlessness, deeming her even thus yet fairer than all fair women. The world calls such love sin—ah, the world is so very wise! Well, many years have drifted by since then: but go you and ask of Beatrice Silviera, in her solitude, where to be *his* consoles her for the loss of all besides, whether that man be indeed a devil, as they say; or whether his voice be not ever gentlest, his care be not ever surest, his patience be not ever perfect, his love be not ever in-

finite to her, in her darkness and her helplessness, whose eyes can never again look once into his own.'

I was silent—awed by her unwonted gravity. I looked at him; he had a cold, hard, careless face, I thought; and he laughed idly where he rode with other men.

'You poor little brat!' cried Fanfreluche contemptuously. 'Are you, who are a dog, as foolish as those poor scribes who, being at their wits' ends for what to say, declare romance is dead in human lives? Pshaw! Do you think that because our friends there ride with flowers in their coats, and cigars in their mouths, and call the loveliest Helen only "not bad-looking," and show their friendship to Patroclus chiefly by "getting up behind him,"* and lounge in the smoking-room of their clubs as though they had not one care upon earth, that therefore they never searched for a four-leaved shamrock? never challenge fight for a brazen shield they deem silver? never wear the sackcloth under the silk, and the iron belt under the Velvet; and never hunger vainly for the sight of a Holy Sepulchre that has no place save in their dreams? Chut!—You know nothing of men!'

I was abashed. To me the riders of the Row looked nothing but a fashionable mob of well-dressed, well-mounted, easy-tempered, and somewhat bored gentlemen. But I suppose she knew best; and to be sure Denzil, gazing at the photograph in solitude, had been a very different person to what he looked now, where he had checked his horse beside the rail, and leaned from his saddle to laugh and talk over the Epsom chances with Fred Orford.

'Look at Derry,' said Fanfreluche sharply, feminine-like, coming round (now I had ceased to ask her) to the very point on which she had refused information. 'Derry is one of the gayest-tempered and most popular men on the town. And yet that man has had a good deal of grief in his life and one murder. He comes from a great old family, and he went through Eton and Christ Church, and into the Guards, and all the rest of the course; and till he was five-and-twenty thought himself as rich as Crœsus. At that time his father died, leaving just a hundred thousand

* Mdlle. Fanfreluche used the fashionable slang she had caught up at the Turf, or the Rag, or the Raleigh. She means backing their friends' bills.—Ed.

pounds' worth of debt behind him. Derry didn't say much; but he just sold the estate—a grand old Cornish place that he loved passionately—paid all the debts, dowered his two sisters, left the Guards, and went into the Austrian army.

'There he rose rapidly; he was of the very stuff for a cuirassier; but when he had got his majority, and had been there some nine years, and had grown fond of the service, an unlucky thing happened; he was second in a duel. It fell to his lot to measure the paces. Now, you know he is a giant in the land, and his strides are longer than those of most men. The other second, who was an Austrian of very high rank, sneered thereat.

"You seem determined to place distance enough between your principal and mine!" he cried scoffingly.

'Denzil took no notice, and the duel was fought. It ended harmlessly, with a bullet graze on both sides. When it was over, Denzil went up to the other second who had jeered him.

"You complained a moment ago of my putting too much distance between the combatants," he said quietly. "We will fight as close as you like now."

'Then out he drew his handkerchief, and tendered one end to the Austrian—Highland fashion. So, breast to breast, with the width of that bit of cambric betwixt them—as many gallant gentlemen were wont to stand for the death-word in the old wild Scottish days—they fired. The shots were simultaneous, and both fell. Denzil was severely wounded in the breast-bone; but the Austrian was shot through the heart."*

'His brother cuirassiers concealed our friend's place of santuary until he had recovered sufficiently for them to get him in safety out of the country; but his career in the army was over—the high station of the dead Austrian made the duel an offence beyond pardon. Denzil took this death greatly to heart also; it was the only duel ending fatally that he had ever fought, and he travelled in many strange eastern lands for some time. Half-a-dozen years ago he came back to the old London life; a thousand

* I can bear witness that Fanfreluche describes the duel as it actually took place, without any exaggeration. So unusual a fact in a female narrator, that I think it necessary to testify to it.—Ed.

a-year or so had been left him by a relative, and on this, with what he makes by those novels of his, that are so gay and so mournful, so weary and so witty, he lives well enough. But—'

'Who is Mrs. D'Eyncourt?' I asked.

'Mrs. D'Eyncourt? Well, Mrs. D'Eyncourt was a very handsome woman, who was all the rage in London when I was just out and belonged to the Household Brigade. She was an actress, and they made her the fashion—for a time. She was an astonishingly beautiful woman, which helped her wonderfully; and an astonishingly proud woman, which went dead against her. She came of an old race, they said; and she was deeply read, and highly cultured. Her husband was a great scoundrel—a sort of gentleman-swindler, who drove her on to the stage, and spent all she gained there; yes, and would have had no objection to have taken any of her money, howsoever it should have been made. He would have staked his wife at piquet, just as soon as he would have staked a sovereign. Denzil was always about with them. He got Mrs. D'Eyncourt her best engagements. He wrote the best critiques that appeared on her. He was in the stalls or behind the scenes every night that she played. He was very much in love with her—that everybody saw. But then, so were a good many others. She had the ball at her feet when she chose to spurn it away. That is, when she had been the talk of the town for two seasons, and was really making something like fame, she disappeared—nobody knows where. Everybody thought Denzil was in the secret. I can't say whether he was. But at any rate, the same night that she vanished, her husband was thrashed within an inch of his life by somebody; and found black and blue, and scarcely able to speak, with the door of his chamber shut on him. I always thought Derry did *that*.'

'And Mrs. D'Eyncourt?'

'How your head runs on that woman! The last night that she appeared was a great triumph for her. A certain cabal—there is always a very strong cabal against a woman who is so unsexed that she won't accept diamonds—had done their best to write her down; had derided her, condemned her, stoned her with injury and insults from the catapults of their criticisms. But the woman was gloriously

handsome, resolute too in will, and of singular talent. She was, for once, stronger than the strong clique against her; she carried the public with her; and the curtain fell at length on a shower of flowers, and amidst a storm of applause. But that night was the last that the town ever saw Gertrude D'Eyncourt. Of course, they all said that Derry had hidden her somewhere, especially as he went abroad the day after. He came back six months later, looking ill enough, and he horsewhipped one fellow who had repeated (so that it came to his hearing) what all the town said of this woman. And of course they were all quite sure *then* it was true.'

'But was it?'

'How can I tell child? All I know is, that I have never heard a syllable about her from anybody, till you told me the other day of that news of Lord Mark's. But, good gracious how you chatter? There are our ponies moving off. I wouldn't miss going with them for worlds. Pearl lunches this morning with some men at the Leviathan, and that hotel is the only place where they do aspic with plovers' eggs so that I can eat it.'

And away the little chatterbox and gourmet trotted ringing her golden bells, and presently jumping into the carriage, was whirled out of sight by the swiftly-trotting feet of Pearl's ponies.

Derry Denzil was talking over the Danebury cracks, by the rails; Peel Vavasour was making some man shriek wit hlaughter, by relating a new *double entendre* of Schentack's; Sir George was discoursing with great animation of the last run of the season with the York and Ainsty; and Vy Bruce was murmuring idlest nonsense to Lillian Lee, as he lighted one of his cigarettes for her use.

I sat on my chair bewildered and saddened. You always are, I think, whenever Belphegor first unroofs the houses for you.

CHAPTER XVII

BELTRAN.

The new burlesque throve at the Coronet. It was a success, as you say in your old jargon. The reckless

breakdowns, the puns—which it seemed really had some humour in them, and therefore were quite uncommon—the splendid Parisian dresses, the lively music, all insured its popularity. And Laura Pearl shone in her jigs—the number of which was increased, according to her desire, with a rollicking zest that raised her higher than ever in the stalls' estimation.

She was generally late to arrive, sullen when crossed for a moment, capricious and ungrateful to an incredible extent, and self-willed with a stubborness of temper which would have brought her heavy fines and loud curses from the tyrannical 'old Wynch' had she been one of those luckless girls who lived in attics and slaved on twenty shillings a week. As it was, of course nobody dared say a word to her; and all the wrath of that Jupiter Tonans, the acting manager, fell on the oftentimes innocent, and invariably defenceless, heads of those hapless young players who had holes in their gloves, and rents in their boots, and a hungry pinched look in their faces, and who toiled in the rain and the gaslight to and from the theatre on foot, whilst her brougham drove up or away with much noise and fury and display, and a dashing roan mare that stepped up to its nose.

Although Beltran had protested against dogs being taken there, I often went down to the Coronet with him; and few things ever amused me much more when I ceased to be bewildered at the strangeness of the life there.

He was not very often there himself, however; except on such evenings as he had those suppers which were the talk of the town—little costly dainty repasts, where a certain sort of wit really did circulate, dead though wit is in your modern society, and where they sometimes played piquet, or écarté, or lasquenet till the morning. There were scarcely more than ten or twelve men, his most intimate companions, that ever had the entrance to the little gilded amber-hued chamber; and, of course, as it became to be considered very *chic* to get the pass there, and as equally, of course, all the women of his own world were jealous in their own minds of what they could not enter into; the many who were excluded said very fearful things of the few who were admitted; and I do verily believe that Beltran's suppers were considered by society to recall

Borgia's feasts, or D'Argenson's nunnery. He knew this very well; but he only laughed at it himself, and did nothing to uproot the conviction. He knew very well, also, that he seldom drank anything stronger there than iced seltzer-water, and never did anything worse there than lose his hundreds on a quatorze of queens. He could have made an end to the reports in a week by inviting a score when he only asked half-a-dozen; but that would not have been a mode of remedy at all like Vere Essendine.

So he continued to shut his doors against the many; and the many continued to assert that the Coronet supper-room was a compound of the Parc aux Cerfs and the Agapemone, with champagne and picquet in its entr'actes.

All the horrors that were whispered of it, however, never prevented the chastest dame that ever I heard of, or the haughtiest Belgravian matron, from accepting with pleasure and smiles his offer of a box for the season. Indeed, to spend an hour and a half while the burlesque was on behind those dainty rose-silk curtains of the *loges*, with little cups of orange pekoe sent to them in his tiniest and choicest china, was one of the pet amusements of the great ladies of his own order; and they would turn their handsome eyes from resting through their lorgnons on the Pearl to smile with sunny welcome on his entrance to their box.

Of course, they all considered his conduct shocking when they spoke of it in their own boudoirs; but that was no reason why they should refuse his fashionable theatre and his fragrant tea. And they never gave a sign that they knew Laura Pearl was anything more than a very well-dressed marionette made of wood and hung upon wires.

In your admirable world there is nothing more easy or more convenient than to ignore—except, indeed, it be to go one step further, and forget.

Your unlucky people, who find it difficult to do the first, break the rules of tact and of good society; your unhappy people, who cannot do the last, break things of less consequence—their hearts.

In this new world of mine I liked every one save this Pearl of price; and she, for her part, cordially detested me, though by me she had gained a pair of ear-rings worth two hundred sovereigns, and a pink tea-set worth fifty. Whenever she saw me—if Beltran's eye was off her—she slapped

or shook, or pinched me; and once gave me a fearful fall by jerking me off the carriage-rug from the footboard of a very lofty mail phaeton.

'Be so good as to leave that dog alone, Laura,' Beltran said to her one day when she was clutching mercilessly at my curls till I screamed.

'I sha'n't, then!' she retorted, and therewith struck me with her fan so hard a blow that the tortoiseshell sticks broke in shivers.

Beltran smiled, well pleased.

'Women's temper generally ends in their own losses,' he murmured. 'You don't look handsome when you get savage.'

Which assurance only made her more furious. This sort of amenities was the usual characteristic of their intercourse; and I often marvelled why a man so fond of repose, and so impatient of anything like a scene, could voluntarily subject himself to it. I remarked this once to Fanfreluche.

That little canine *cocodette* turned her nose in the air with her wonted gesture of scorn.

'My dear, where's another woman so handsome?'

And this was true.

You people, when you write about love, do not allow enough weight to the influence of purely physical attractions.

The town had pronounced Laura Pearl the 'handsomest thing out.' It is as agreeable to a man's pride and sense of possession to hear this said of his mistress, as it is for him to hear his year-old racer pronounced nearer perfection than all the two hundred and odd horses to be seen in the yard on a Sunday afternoon. This is not a lofty motive for passion, you say? Ah, well, I cannot help that. A great many of your motives are not lofty.

Beltran, moreover, had been bred and born in a sphere where women, after all, are really held in much the same esteem as in any oriental country, though they are treated with more outward forms of deference and courtesy, and cost a very great deal more for their maintenance. In his youth he had been besieged and disgusted by marriage-makers of his own order; and he had now in his manhood got into a congenial habit of only seeking his loves in a world from which the demon of marriage was exorcised

He did not want mental power in his mistress, nor yet affection; he found the first, in plenty, in other forms of society; and he looked on the latter with a sort of horror as on something that would 'bore' him infallibly and unbearably.

Indeed, like many men of his time, he did his very utmost to persuade himself that he was heartless, and everybody else that he was mindless.

Yet a keener intelligence than his few men were born with; and a truer friend than he was never lived. Now, your fine intelligence will always soon or late grow dissatisfied with abasing itself to the senses; and he who can be a sincere friend has also in him the capability of sincere love.

A trifle, too, showed me this temper in him.

[And by the way, permit me to add that if you were quicker and wiser at guessing your companions' characters from the indices of trifles, you would not make those everlasting blunders of foolish trust and idiotic suspicion which so continually excite in you the contempt and wonder of dogs!]

This happened when I had been about a month in his possession.

'What a pity that boy was in such a deuce of a hurry to kill himself,' said Denzil, one evening, as they drove down to a Richmond dinner. I being ensconced in the back-seat, and there being, for once, no woman in the front.

'What boy?' asked Beltran.

'That poor young wretch who wrote the *Demeter*. I see they have brought some posthumous poems of his out "by the late Harold Gerant," and they are likely to make a sensation. There is certainly wonderful stuff in them.'

'How do they get out if he's dead? I thought publishers would have nothing to say him.'

'They would have nothing—whilst he was alive. That is their way. They have a knack of thinking that genius, like Ganges grass, only exhales its worth when it's been well crushed. It seems that there were manuscripts of his lying about in various places; and after the issue of that fragment the Trade thought it a decent speculation to collect, and to issue them.'

'More fool the Trade, then. While Massinger, and

Ford, and Marvell lie unread in ninety-nine libraries out of a hundred, who wants the catchpenny jingle of 19th-century verse?'

'Come, come; you said yourself that there was great promise in that fragment.'

'So I might. But I take it if the man's dead it don't matter much what he promised; he can't come up to time with any of it, whether it's a promissory note or a promissory poem.'

'Don't be a brute, Vere! The poor lad would rest quieter in his grave, I fancy, for knowing that those thoughts of his are not all lost.'

'Everybody does rest quiet in his grave, I believe, unless he's scooped up with a spade by an enterprising Railway Company. You literary men do allow yourselves such poetic license of expression. Surely, from your own sentimental point of view, you ought to be awfully glad this young idiot did kill himself: who would know anything of Chatterton if it weren't for that lucky dose of prussic acid? and who would care a hang for Shelley if, in lieu of dying poetically, he had lived to grow fat, leave off his sailor's jacket, read family prayers, and turn laureate?'

'If you would only read this book—'

'I! good gracious! When do I ever read anything, unless it be a novel of yours, or of Lawrence's?'

'If you would only read the poem you would see what it is that I mean. There are a hundred faults in them, of course; but there is a wonderful glow of imagery and depth of thought in them for the works of so mere a boy. No pretentiousness either; no borrowed Catullan images; no mock incestuous rapture; but the strength of passions struggling with their tempters, like young lions in a net; and yet, with all their latent woe and fire, the purity of a mind that had evidently fed on the simplicity of some free, open-air, and meditative life—the only true life for the poet and the painter. If you would for once read them—'

'But I never shall, my dear Derry. So I will take your praises on trust; the only way not to be obliged to disagree with them. Just now, rhapsodies on bisque soup and red mullets are more to my taste. I wish your dead boy all sorts of living laurels, but I clearly foresee that he will grow into a bore. Pray don't let us have too much of him.'

Denzil flung himself back in his seat, a little out of temper.

I, lying coiled in my tiger rug, wondered within myself.

It so chanced that a month or so earlier I had happened to go out in the forenoon with Beltran, at a different hour to his usual one. And he had wended his way, walking, with a cigar in his mouth, to a certain house of business; where with my own ears I had distinctly heard him, in a somewhat long business interview, commission the principals of the house to search for all manuscripts bearing the inscription attached to the poem of *Demeter;* when found, to have the noblest of such fragments selected by some scholar competent to make the choice, and then to have them printed and issued with as little delay as possible, and at his own cost. I had also heard the persons he had thus commissioned ask if they might, without offence, inquire the reason for his interest in the young dead penniless writer? and had heard his answer. 'Interest? None in the least. I never saw him in my life. But the boy had genius; and it ought not to be buried with his body.' And therewith he left, desiring that his name should not in any way be associated with the affair, but that the publishers themselves should appear to be the originators, as well as the executors, of the matter.

Herein it appeared that he had been thoroughly well obeyed. The poems had appeared, been discussed, been admired, and the name of the dead boy was on the lips of many; but not a soul had ever dreamed that he had so much as thought twice of the story of the suicide that Denzil had told at his Sunday breakfast.

But why conceal this generous and sympathetic action? —and conceal it too with this cynical assumption of contemptuous indifference?

Nay, I cannot tell; I can only say it was his way of belying himself; a way I have known in more men than one of like temperament.

'They do good by stealth, and blush to find it known;' or rather swear impatiently to find it known, as their manner is. I do not say that this masking of all their better acts and thoughts is of itself commendable; but I think, in view of the innumerable creatures who crow out aloud their own charities, and of the abundant hypocrites who only fold

their robes to hide their vice and avarice, such exceptions as his are refreshing, and not to be condemned. If you have not known men like him, men of this order and of this habit of speech and act, you will not be likely to comprehend the character of this master of mine.

Presently we dashed over Richmond Hill, and drew up before the old Star and Garter. And here Beltran, with the Duke of Astolat, Ned Guilliadene, a Chargé d'Affaires, and a Guardsman, gave one of those dinners which seemed part and parcel of his duties as lessee of the Coronet. A dinner where all the prettiest of his actresses blossomed forth in the most intensely Parisian of dresses, and many hundred pounds' worth of diamonds and rubies. Where the portly dame, always attached to the house, who would be either Hamlet's mother or Mrs. Candour, the Countess Capulet or Mrs. Bouncer, appeared in velvets of the richest purple, or violet, or ruby, for she played propriety on many scarcely proper occasions, and this is a lucrative office always gratefully acknowledged. Where that charming woman, Mrs. Delamere (who on the stage had something of the sympathetic acting and elegant ease of the French school, yet saw herself almost disregarded by an audience eager for the breakdowns and burlesques of Laura Pearl), brought the superb grace and proud negligence of a duchess, though her forsaken lord was a wine-merchant's clerk, who had wedded her out of a milliner's work-room. Where the male comedians, making in private the same blunder that distinguished them in public, thought coarseness and buffoonery were wit; and took an insane relish in the privilege of the moment, which allowed them to address without prefix as 'Beltran,' and 'Brune,' and 'Desmond,' and 'Denzil,' men who, meeting them the next day in Pall-mall, barely gave them a nod of the head as good morning. Such a dinner as their host had sat at hundreds of times, bored to death by the drear monotony of the thing, which so exactly reproduced itself one year after another. He knew precisely when Mrs. Delamere would smile, when Mrs. Mac Mundo would frown, what puns his first comedy-man would make, and where he would infallibly make them; what pretty consternation his actresses would show at the first questionable story that came round with the chablis; what flushed amusement they would receive a much naughtier

one with, when they had come to the chartreuse; what riotous laughter the Pearl would give to the punsters as she crammed the crystallised sweetmeats into her rosy mouth, and had her armies of glasses replenished again and again; what exquisite dignity disdainful Maude Delamere would show as she swept away on the terrace with her black laces all trailing about her; and what nonsense he should be expected to murmur in the scent of the geraniums and heliotropes to these women, every turn of whose features and every tone of whose voices he knew as well as the letters of the alphabet. Dinners at which his actors would drink the rich wines, and the actresses eat the rare fruits, of his giving; but from which as often as not they would drive away, the one to curse him as a swell because he had not laughed at their broadest joke, and the other to mutter against him as a niggard, because the enamelled or jewelled present laid with the bread-roll under the napkin was a shade less costly than what they had desired.

Little Fanfreluche was right.

In other ages the jesters fed on blows and black broth, yet oftentimes loved their princes, and would have died for them had only their jingling bauble been a two-edged sword. But in this age the wagered fools, fed on the fat of the land, and drenched with the choicest of vintages, have none such fealty as this, but rise from their master's board to spit forth venom behind his steps, and ring their bells to chime out his dishonour.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIS VIEWS ON DINNERS.

Apropos of these Richmond entertainments, I often wondered, by the way, why men, who had their own admirable cooks, and their own elegant abodes, and their own choice selected wines, were so addicted to coming out to dinner at the Star and Garter, or Ship, or any suburban place, that it was fashionable to dine at in this manner.

I often wondered what peculiar attraction existed for them in spending about five times as much on their dinner as it would have cost at home, only for the sake of getting in return a questionable cuisine, lumpy sauces, cold soups, and fifth-rate champagnes at exorbitant prices.

I never solved the question; and I cannot but think the mode is an extraordinary mistake—a great waste of time and money, without any adequate *quid pro quo*.

If I, instead of being a dog, fed at best on scattered crumbs, were a rich man, and a man of influence enough to be able to command whatever society I chose, I should never dine out of my own house.

But if everybody did that, you object, who would there be for guests? Pooh! my dear friend, men will never be so equal but what there will always be your gay, courtly, silver-tongued, half-bankrupt, though well-born Martial, who will always be charmed to enjoy the magnificence of Lucan's villa. And if I were Lucan, I would always eat my *cœna* at home.

A dinner is not a thing which should be left to chance. The choice of so delicate a combination as the *menu* should never be given over to hazard. And now that I am on this topic, forgive me if I add my mite to all that has been already written on the great science of dining.

I have seen a great many dinners in my time, since that first London season with Beltran. Duchesses', actresses', millionaires', playwrights', nobles', and bohemians' dinners—I have been present at them all, one time and another, and I cannot forbear from a few remarks on the subject. Dining, or rather giving dinners with success, is an art. Epicures have recognised this long ago, but I want it universally recognised.

There is no reason in life why Rus, with only his bottle of old port, and his new-laid eggs, and his plump home-fed pullets, and his sunny apricots fresh from the warm south wall, and his honey drawn from his own cabbage-roses and carnations and white jessamine flowers, and a ruddy-cheeked, clean-handed Phillis, and a shady, leaf-bowered, sweet-scented little chamber, should not study to give an entertainment very charming in its own fashion, quite as well as Urbs, who has his swift, silent, clever men-servants, and his gold plate, and his porcelains costly as gold, and his cook, with the soul of a Carême, and his magnificent pines, and his hothouse grapes, and his wonders of food brought from all ends of Europe, and his perfect wines all of comet years, and his brilliant guests culled from the Legations and the two Houses, from White's and the Guards' Club, from Brooks' and Boodles'.

The two entertainments will be at the two extremes of the art, of course; but there is no reason why they should not both be true art—like a Meissonnier and a Poussin.

Lookers-on see the most of the game, they say. Perhaps you will bear with me a moment, whilst I tell you one or two things that I think of your dinners.

They are not anything like what they might be. Here, in London, you have every requisite for the very best dinners—dinners to call up Brillat Savarin, in ecstasy, from his grave. You have the best wines, you have the best food, you have handsome women, you have clever men, and you never spare any expense; how is it, then, that in London you reiterate the eternal complaint—all of you—that there is no such thing as Society? It is really very ridiculous; you ought to be ashamed of the confession.

You echo it one after another, and yet night after night you go on elbowing each other at assemblies that resemble a crush on a hustings, and crowding together in fashionable mobs at garden-parties, and you do nothing in the world to remedy the defect.

Now it is a fact—if you don't go to them I can't help that—it is a fact that there are little dinners even in London which are a success, because they are thoroughly enjoyable.

Why are they so?

Well, one can hardly give a recipe for Society any more than for cooking an omelet. It is not a knowledge to be taught; it is a thing that comes by nature; a thing of genius.

They are agreeable, first of all, because they are given out of a genuine design to amuse and be amused, and not merely to 'knock off' a social duty, and occupy a space in the 'fashionable intelligence.'

Also because they are small enough for the ball of conversation to be tossed lightly, and rapidly, from every hand; the talk is not therefore a mere buzzing and cross-fire of a score of voices.

Also because the host or hostess has the supreme talent of selection, and also the supreme talent of leading the conversation, unostentatiously, but skilfully; it is almost as great a talent as that of leading aright at whist. And this also in a manner must come by nature, though it may be increased and polished by study.

If you are people who will persist in giving huge 'feeds,' as slang very fittingly styles them, of thirty or forty covers, I cannot hope to instruct you. But if you are open to conviction and willing to give little dinners (one every night if you like) of four, six, or at most eight, guests, just listen to me.

Be firm in rejecting an odiously long *menu*. A dozen services are quite enough in all reason; and to risk too great length, is certainly to risk *ennui;* a touch of *ennui* will make your dinner a failure, even though your cook should be a Vatel.

Take heed to have amidst your dishes two or three which, whilst exquisitely prepared, yet shall be perfectly simple and wholesome; remember that your very choicest *bon viveurs* are the very people most grateful for a change in this respect; and remember too the great Savarin's eulogy of a larded fowl, which he preferred to all the chickens fricassée'd, suprême'd, marengo'd, singara'd, or bordelaise'd that could be proffered him.

Have a care that your servants are perfectly educated in the science of the wine-book, so that they may be certain to give the proper vintage at the proper time, and neither fill the glasses too fast or too seldom. Have your table elegantly appointed, and a fair show of gold or silver to brighten it; but let your flowers be far more conspicuous than your plate, since they must be far more beautiful, and you do not want your board to look like a great silversmith's shop-window. The most delicate porcelains and the exquisite cristalleries of Clichy or Baccarat may be mingled with advantage; Majolica or Dresden is too heavy, to my taste, for a dinner-table.

Pray do not follow the ridiculous mode of thinking it *chic* to have everything out of its proper season; it is never really good; if you be a real genius you can well afford to abandon the flavourless asparagus of mid-winter and strawberries of Christmas with silent contempt to millionaires and the *demi-monde*, who have no other thought than to display their ill-gotten gains.

As regards the number of servants, I think you make a mistake in fancying it is their quantity and not their quality that is of importance. When there are too many they only tread on one another's toes, as they have trod on

my tail many a time. A couple of men perfectly trained will do more for the comfort of your guests than a dozen powdered giants behind the chairs, if the giants be secretly intent on listening for the last new scandal or afraid of injuring their own dignity by a swift movement.

Unless a servant be as exact as clock-work, and as indifferent to the talk round him as an automaton, he is not worth the tax you pay for him. A servant that I know well would not start if a thunderbolt burst at his feet when he was handing the asparagus, nor give a sign that he heard if a score of Sydney Smiths were doing their best to kill him with laughter as he changed their plates; now *that* man is worth his weight in gold. But there are thousands of footmen who will preserve a decorous aspect of earless and eyeless gravity throughout a dinner, while very many of them are listening and seeing with all their might for all that—hence they wait badly.

To the good servant his attendance is his art, and he has no thought except to obey its rules absolutely. The most beautiful woman should be sexless, and the most eloquent scandal-monger be tongueless, for aught that he should know or should care. Now, you can make your pattern servant as you can make your standard rose—at least, if you be fit to give a good dinner you can.

Of course you will never in future years resort to the hideousness of food set on the table, now that the Russian mode has once taught you how to refine, and, if one may say so, to spiritualise eating. Nor will the grotesque folly of nodding the head over each glass at some neighbour, like a mandarin on a tea-box, in a custom called 'taking wine' (of which I have heard, though it was over long before my time), ever be revived, it is to be hoped, for nothing can well be more thoroughly absurd. Yet the present system of pouring the same wines in everybody's glass, without any seeming remembrance of the exceeding difference in men's wine-palates, is not what it ought to be.

There are men who only like two sorts of wine in one evening; men who like a different vintage with each service; men who like all their wines still; men who abominate certain brands; men who like the French order of precedence for their wines; men who like the English

order, which is exactly contrary to it; all those various tastes should be more consulted than they are usually by butlers.

Of course my own race are all Rechabites, therefore I treat this question from a purely impersonal point of view. No one, I am happy to say, ever saw a dog drunk; inebriety is one of those 'superiorities' which you are so naturally proud to claim over us. Men, pigs, ducks and geese are the four orders of creatures distinguished by a capacity for drunkeness; perhaps it is for this reason that they all four make more noise over their own small affairs—a rise in gold, a swill-tub, a caddis worm, or a blade of grass—than any other created thing ever is overheard to do.

But all these, after all, are the merest matters of detail compared with the one essential element of prandial success—*i.e.* the conversation. After all the great account that we make of decoration and of cookery, I have seen two thoroughly enjoyable dinners—one in a little set of chambers where the carte was confined to beef-steaks, oysters, Poméry Gréno and Pichon de Longueville; and the other in a little fishing inn overhanging a picturesque trout-river, where the entire fare consisted of those dainty fish perfectly grilled, and a grand capon, that would have warmed Falstaff's heart, washed down by the sparkling ales of Trent.

But then, those who dined at the first were six of the gayest, cleverest, and happiest-tempered people that ever tilted together in a playful tournament of tongues; and the anglers who laughed over the last were two of the wittiest writers that ever charmed the world; a soldier whose silver speech is as lightly brilliant as his deeds of daring are of sternest fame; and one woman, frank, bright, full of grace and of beauty, a child in her mirth and a queen in her empire.

N.B. Of these four, none were in love; if only one had 'lost his head,' the harmony of the dinner would have been most probably at an end; the perfect freedom of it certainly would have been. They were only friends, in that intimate, pleasant, half-romantic friendship, which only men and women of the highest intelligence can know.

The one great element of success at a dinner is the talk; and who shall give a recipe, as I say, for that? It

is a thing that goes by nature, like the gift of colour and of song.

It is preposterous to say that your men do not talk well. I have heard talk to the full as brilliant and as epigrammatic as anything the cleverest writer can put into the mouths of his imaginary characters. When I hear people protest that in real life no such witty converse as you find in very witty novels can ever be met, I wonder where these protestants have had the misfortune to live. As I said in my introductory remarks, it is almost as difficult to print the wit one hears as it is to petrify a *soufflée de fécule;* but if you never hear wit in this world—good gracious me!—you must keep very bad company.

I think it is a mistake to think that tremendously clever people are required to obtain radiant conversation. Your very great genius, your very obstruse scholar, is often a very stupid fellow, so far as lingual utterances go. The best men at a dinner are such men as are to be found by the dozen at the best clubs in London; men of quick intelligence, of good culture, of consummate worldly knowledge, and of just that sparkling, mischievous pleasant social wit which is to conversation what the truffle is to cookery, or the champagne is amongst wines.

These men are to be found, and better companions need never be sought. True, at some tables they may sit silent, *morne*, and as contemptuous as their politeness permits, but believe me, that is only because at those tables you are boring them. Get them into a congenial atmosphere, their tongues will go, their mirth sparkle, and their laugh be heard as enjoyably as any one can wish. They *can* be the most amusing companions in the world; if they are not so with you, it is your fault: you bore them in some way.

Politics you should banish absolutely—if people are not of one mind about them they are sure to quarrel over them; if they *are* of one mind no subject can be drearier. Some little bit of political news, quite fresh from some Legation or some Secretary of State, before the world has heard it, is all that should be admissible.

Any quite fresh scandal is a great relish; especially if you know something about it that no one else knows. Perhaps you had better take heed that the chief of the actors involved are not present; though, indeed, in this

age you are all so entirely free from prejudice on these points that (if you be discussing a divorce, for instance) you need not mind the presence of the relatives in the least, scarcely of the husband now-a-days; the only person whose feelings must not be hurt is the co-respondent. Where this last interesting personage is in the plural you had better not invite two of them at the same time; they are sure to have either two much jealousy, or too much compassion, for one another.

Du reste—Don Juan is always a delightful fellow, and the most amusing guest you can ever obtain, unless indeed it be weighing on his mind that he will have to marry Julia Abbandonata. In which case of course you cannot reasonably expect him to be lively.

If you have not the knack of setting the ball of talk rolling, it is impossible I can impart it to you: one cannot make a good host any more than one can make a great composer: both are born. Still there are a few things which help it. In the first place, there is the care needful in the selection of your guests; they must suit one another, or you will have discord; a mingling of classes or of opposite political parties is, I think, a mistake: men are more at ease in their own caste; if you introduce an 'outsider,' he or she must be a very brilliant one.

Let your party be of very small number rather than, for sheer sake of enlarging it, introduce the wrong element because you cannot get the right. There is a certain unity of feeling, and common likeness of tone and manner, in an Order, still more so in each 'set' of that 'order,' which is, if made use of, an essential aid to harmony in itself. It is an infinite *ennui* to a man to sit next to another who does not catch his allusions flying; it ruins conversation when one person outside the pale fails to understand all that is cause for mirth or for chat within it.

Likewise, you should be very careful not to let any topic get worn threadbare; the instant it is getting the least bit of a bore, sweep it away with the brisk besom of a fresh and welcome subject.

A little scandal is, as I say, an excellent thing; nobody is ever brighter or happier of tongue than when he is making mischief of his neighbour; but it is a two-edged sword that requires very dainty handling; and all caps of

slander unluckily fit so very many heads that you must be heedful how you select them.

If it be a party of both sexes, ask people that are a *little* in love with each other, for people a little in love are always eager to shine; but banish all *grandes passions;* they have an eloquence of their own indeed, but they are very stupid society at a dinner-table.

And now, if you be a woman, let me offer you one piece of advice, though I know you will never follow it: DON'T THINK OF YOURSELF. Resign your pet flirtation *pro tempo;* don't care for 'making play' even with your favourite lover. Do not indulge your own palate, nor meditate on your own dress; let your heart and soul be with your guests, let your whole mind be given to the guidance and the surveillance of the conversation. Remember that your dinner is your campaign, and that on your skilful direction depends your victory.

But then withal you must be quite at ease, and not in the least pre-occupied, or your influence will be *nil;* you must be always gay, alert, suave, ready to skim over a difficulty, to supply an hiatus, and to prevent a pause; you must lead with radiance and with tact, and yet you must be perfectly willing not to shine, and to let your powers lie *perdu* if your guests are in full career without you, and if your self-assertion would be their interruption.

Do you think this all very hard?

Well, my dear, if it were ten times harder, would you not have your reward when men should declare that your dinners were the most charming in London?

One last word,—leave the table early, and do not grudge the men their half hour of solitude. Nay, send them cigars and a *chasse* to prolong it. A trial to you I know—but they like it; don't you believe them if they tell you they don't. They may call it a 'barbarous custom;' but it is one that they relish exceedingly, as they do many other 'barbarities'—their vices to wit; and you will be all the more successful as a dinner-giver if you have the sense in you to see this.

The most charming woman will be only wise if she take fully into her mind the conviction that too much even of herself may be a bore.

I don't know what more I can tell you; one cannot

make a dinner-giver as I have said, any more than one can make a Michael Angelo. I am half afraid, too, that you English, despite your repute for hospitality, have not the genius of entertainment in you. You are far too self conscious and you are seldom light-hearted enough.

If I were to tell you, also, all that I have heard your guests, when they have gone out in the night air and had their cigars fairly in their mouths, say of dinners you had thought quite perfection you would not believe me. There is nowhere such a thorough-going sceptic as a man or woman who disbelieves in his or her own shortcomings.

So I will not weary you longer on the subject, as I can hardly hope to improve you, even if you had not skipped this chapter in my memoirs, which is probable. Let me only paraphrase a famous saying, and add:

'*Montrez-moi ton menu, je te montrerai ton cœur.*'

CHAPTER XIX.

HE STUDIES THE STAGE.

I LEARNED many wondrous things betwixt Epsom and Ascot. A brief space, indeed, yet one that to me seemed longer than the whole of my previous life, so crowded was its every hour with new and marvellous experiences. Worldly experiences, I mean. Intellectually, I am not sure that I acquired much.

Indeed, to a little brain teeming with memories of the Théâtres Beaumarchais, Voltaire, Molière, Feuillet, Sardou, Sandeau, &c., which I had heard read so continually at the Dower-house amongst the Fens, the views of dramatic literature held at the Coronet appeared of the most extraordinary character. They certainly had one merit—simplicity.

The verb 'to steal' was the only one that a successful dramatic author appeared to be required to conjugate.

For your music steal from the music-halls; for your costumes steal from *Le Follet;* for your ideas steal from any-

body that happens to carry such a thing about him; for your play, in its entirety, steal the plot, the characters, the romance, the speeches, and the wit, if it have any, of some attractive novel; and when you have made up your parcel of thefts tie it together with some string of stage directions, herald it as entirely original, give a very good supper to your friends on the press, and bow from your box as the 'Author.'

You will certainly be successful: and if the novelist ever object, threaten him with an action for interference with *your* property.

These I found were the laws laid down by London dramatists; and they assuredly were so easy to follow and so productive to obey, that if any Ben Jonson, or Beaumarchais, Sheridan, or Marivaux, had arisen and attempted to infringe them, he would have infallibly been regarded as a very evil example, and been extinguished by means of journalistic slating and stall-siflage.

Beltran had indeed now and then imperilled the peace and prosperity of his Coronet by certain forms of opposition to this quiet régime of uninterrupted theft. Once, I heard, he had actually lost some hundred pounds by relinquishing a piece at the day before its production, because he found out that it was a piracy from a novel, and that the novel-writer had an antiquated prejudice against being robbed.

Also, when a piece was taken from the French, he had the weakness not only to pay the Frenchman for doing him the honour to use his creation, but actually had 'translated and adapted from the French original' printed in his programmes and advertisements; a ridiculous concession to truth, which kept his house half empty—the English public naturally fearing pollution from so unnaturally unadulterated an article.

But Beltan was quite an exception amongst lessees; and it was no wonder that all the town by the voices of its prophets declared for once unanimously that he must be ruined in a twelvemonth. Indeed, they said it was only the wisdom of Dudley Moore and little Lance that had saved him from destruction hitherto.

'What's that new piece you have advertised, Vere?' asked Paget Albermarle at one of the Sunday breakfasts.

'This,' answered Beltran, tossing over to him a paper-covered book.

'*Le Péché de Vivienne*,' read Albermarle, 'and you call it *Vivia's Secret*. What sort of thing is it?'

'O, a glorious piece,' said Denzil, lifting his head. 'I saw it in Paris a month ago, with the Desaix in it. A terrible piece, strong and noble, and full of a curious kind of poetry, and of a wonderful power. Desaix looks superb in it too. She is a grand woman. But you never mean to say you are going to bring it out, Beltran?

'We are going to turn it into English for the Coronet,' answered Leo Lance, striking into the conversation. 'It is wonderfully effective, as you say. We shall have to shorten it—make it three acts; and it will be more of a drama than a tragedy, of course. There's no time for a long play before the burlesque.

Denzil shuddered very visibly.

'A drama—three acts—one knows what that means! Good heavens, Vere! How came you to decide on the thing before I came back? I could have told you that you haven't a creature in your company capable of giving the Péché de Vivienne.'

Beltran lifted his brow wearily.

'You were at Nice, and we wanted something; we have been doing this old legitimate business too long: Lance suggested this play, and thought that it read very well.'

'Of course it read very well! It is the finest thing they have had over there since *Marion Delorme*. It is a tremendous tragedy, I tell you; and you have vulgarised it by this atrocious title already!'

'Mr. Lance is an excellent adapter,' put in the quiet sonorous voice of the great editor of the *Midas*. 'He always filters so well, that no residuum of the original genius ever appears.'

The hapless Mouse coloured and fidgeted where he sat; but he never dared to resent the sharpest thrust of his great censor.

'I intend to adhere quite closely to the French play,' he muttered sullenly. 'It will only be slightly shortened; I shall hardly change the text at all.

'Then you may withdraw the piece after its first night, Vere,' said Dudley Moore, serenely.

'Don't you like it?' asked Beltran.

'Like it?' echoed Dudley Moore. 'How is that the

question? It is a very clever play; very clever, though I am scarcely so enthusiastic on its merits as Denzil. But it is a play simply unproducible in England.'

'O, nonsense!' cried Denzil! 'how is it worse than dozens we give? The poor woman never sins but once, and that under such circumstances, and with such agonies of remorse, that the moral is the finest possible. There's not an indecent line in the tragedy; it is only fearfully human and real.'

Dudley Moore shrugged his shoulders.

'You write for the English public, and don't know them better than *that!*'

'Than what?'

The editor closed his cynical mouth, and entirely refused to say.

'Than to suppose that they like what is human and real, he means,' said Beltran. 'They don't care the least about that; they like a little broad farce, a little rough murder, and a little rosewater sentiment. Anything more bothers them; they can't understand it.'

'Then why, in heaven's name, fritter away on them a grand play like this?' cried Denzil.

'Can't be helped now. Lance has begun it, and the announcements are out.'

'And who is to play Vivienne?'

'Maude Delamere, of course.'

'What? A character almost as awful as Phædre, and quite as desolate as Antigone, represented by a graceful coquette in point lace and pearls, who would take poison as sweetly as if it were a cup of coffee, and will die with elaborate care not to tumble her train? Preposterous!'

'Blaze away, Derry,' said Beltran resignedly. 'But the thing's settled. There's only one question: to keep to the story or not. Old Wynch will have it that it won't do.'

'Old Wynch knows his world,' said Dudley Moore. 'Of course you must change the story, in its chief incident. Indeed, I don't see that Mr. Lance need acknowledge any indebtedness to his original; he will only appropriate the main idea, all the characters, as much of the passion as he dare use, and all the wit that he can contrive to translate. *Si peu de chose!*—not worth a reference.'

The poor Mouse moved uneasily.

'My intention was,' he murmured, 'to have given the piece quite as it stands, love and all.'

'What! with the susceptibilities of the British Public!' said Dudley Moore. 'They never stand any nonsense with the seventh commandment, remember. You must change the illicit love into a decorous bigamy. Indeed, you might try trigamy. They wouldn't at all mind three husbands.'

'Bigamy!' sighted the adapter. 'They never have enough of *that*.'

'No. The English conscience is so intensely mercantile, that it has no notion of a passion that does not result in the cheating of somebody,' said Denzil, taking aim at me with a coffee bonbon. 'Bigamy is fraud; and the fraud commends it to the public of these very commercial isles. But it will ruin all the symmetry of the piece; it will entirely destroy its purport. It will make it altogether witless, senseless, absurd. It will neither have point nor intention; neither meaning nor object!'

'No sort of objections to it on the stage those,' answered Dudley Moore quietly. '*You* ought to be well aware of this, Mr. Lance; you have had theatrical successes.'

Little Lance winced, as he usually did, beneath the great censor's flagellations.

'It is different with this,' he muttered, apologetically. 'Denzil is right. You see, it's really very grand in the original. A great sin, and a great repentance, and all that; symmetrical, you know; really artistic; and if one has to change it into bigamy, it will just be vulgarised and brutalised, that's all.'

'Precisely,' said Dudley Moore, still in the most affable manner. 'We want something to attract a London fashionable audience, don't we?'

'Don't go in for a dramatic conscience, Mouse,' said Beltran; 'it's too late in the day—all that sort of thing.'

'You have had one, my dear Vere,' said Dudley Moore. 'I think, on the whole, you have spent more on it than on your racehorses?'

'The deuce I have!' murmured Beltran. 'Take your own way, Lance, if you like—'

'Only,' the censor interrupted, 'you won't have a week's run if you do. With Lady Frederic just bolted for the third time, and Lady Stevenham coming into the D. C. with her amatory four-in-hand, the aristocracy will be infinitely too virtuous to look at a heroine who sins *once*, and then repents.'

Beltran laughed a little. The world had added his name to those of Lady Stevenham's favoured quartette, and he knew well enough that he had only waltzed twice with the woman, and scarcely thought about her as often.

'I'd chance that,' he made answer. 'The thing is, that French part is an awfully strong one, and I've nobody strong enough for it, if we render it as it stands.'

'There's always the Delamere.'

'Pshaw! Maude Delamere is a very pretty creature, and drapes herself uncommonly well; but she could no more give the passion of that French play than she could do you Phædre in the original.'

'No,' assented Dudley Moore. 'Mrs. Delamere acts very gracefully, and dresses very charmingly, and is one of the few Englishwomen that can carry a Cashmere; but she is Mrs. Delamere in every part that she plays, and if I saw her in Lady Macbeth, I should expect to see her with her fan and her eye-glass, her black guipure lace, and her afternoon tea.'

'To be sure! The perfection of an actress is to get out of herself; and none of ours ever do that.'

'They're too fond of themselves.'

'That's just it. They're a set of nice-looking women who dress well, and look well, and—never forget it!'

'The greatest actress I ever saw,' put in Denzil, was a little Jewess of Cordova. She had no sort of beauty; she was small and yellow; she had nothing in the world but those wonderful Israel eyes, and a voice like a silver cymbal. And yet, what a genius that creature was! She was only playing in a wretched Spanish theatre, just for the populace; but I went night after night to see her. It was marvellous! That woman could reach every passion and every pain in human nature. She was transfigured, metamorphosed, the moment the fury of art got into her. She would give you anything: an old man dying of wretchedness, a young girl wild with first love, a miser gloating over his gold, a homeless child heartsick and lost, a forsaken mistress burning for vengeance, a discrowned queen daunting a mob, a murderess stealing to slaughter, a maiden blushing over sweet shame—that creature *was* them all, one after another, as she would. You never saw *her* at all. You only saw the thing that she chose to create.'

'Nothing short of that is genius,' said Dudley Moore briefly. 'The only great actress is a woman whom you utterly forget in the impersonation that she chooses you to see. The actresses we are blessed with are always making us think, how well A looks to-night, how intricate B's coiffure is, how becoming that tawny satin is to C, and how resplendent are D's diamonds!'

'What did you let that Jewess slip for, Derry?' asked Beltran.

'Well, I shouldn't have let her slip. It's years ago now; but I had half a mind to take her over to Paris or London just on the chance. It seemed atrocious that such transcendent gifts as these should be wasted on muleteers, and water-carriers, and olive-pickers. But just about three weeks after I had first seen her act in a comedy of Calderon's she was killed—killed horribly, gored to death in the streets, by a circus-bull that had broken loose from his drivers maddened with the midnight-glare and the tumult of the people. I didn't see her die, thank God.'

He said it so simply, and so touchingly, that there was silence for a moment in the chamber.

'It is always so!' said Dudley Moore at last, with a plaintive *pitié de soi-même!* 'The dear Delameres, who are of no earthly artistic use, always live on and on, till good dinners and too much champagne destroy the only symmetry they possess—that of form. And a creature of genius, like this Jewess of yours, is always killed by a bull, or a fever, or a bit of orange peel on the pavement, or something that is blundering and bizarre!'

'Mrs. D'Eyncourt had some genius, eh?' said Beltran.

'No,' Denzil answered rather coldly. 'She was a woman of beauty, and of talent; but she was by no means a genius.'

'No,' said Dudley Moore. 'I remember her very well; a splendid woman, but she had not genius. I doubt if any Englishwoman ever has; I cannot call one to mind. Your great feminine intelligences have all been Italian or French, and your great feminine actresses all Jewesses. An Englishwoman is never impersonal enough, nor sympathetic enough, for real genius. With her "the great I is the measure of the universe."'

'There was Mrs. Siddons?' hazarded Denzil.

Dudley Moore took snuff.

'I have grave doubts of Mrs. Siddons. She was a goddess of the age of fret and fume, of stalk and strut, of trilled R's and of nodding plumes. If we had Siddons now I fear we should hiss; I am quite sure we should yawn. She must have been Melpomene always; Nature never.'

'You are very hard to please!' said Denzil.

'I never am pleased,' responded the great censor meekly.

'Well, let us finish about the piece,' interposed Beltran. 'Is it to be a fine play badly acted, or a bad play decently acted? It must be one or the other.'

'O, the bad play, of course,' decided Dudley Moore. 'Your women always dress well, and build their hair in the latest fashion; so long as you do that, the Public won't mind what words they hear so long as they are not words that fly utterly over their heads. Your people always look good style; and if the play's tolerably silly they'll be strong enough for it.'

'I wish they heard you!'

'They have heard me—fifty times. But it don't make any difference. They stare at the stalls, while they talk of the moon, and they keep an eye on the *Times* critic as they writhe in their death agony.'

'You wish this thing made irrational and stupid then?' asked Beltran, stirring the leaves of the French play-book.

'I wish you to have a success, my dear fellow—yes.'

Beltran laughed a little.

'Well, do as he tells you, Mouse. He knows best. Don't make the stalls yawn, whatever you do, that's all.'

'They won't yawn,' said Dudley Moore confidently; 'not if they find there is going to be bigamy early enough in the first act, and if you transform that grand old priest of the Paris piece into a Yankee elder from the Salt Spring, or a pedagogue of the Busby type.'

Denzil ruefully drew caricatures with his pencil on the paper cover of the *Péché de Vivienne*, and heard in silence.

'What does that mean, Derry?' asked his friend, construing the silence into disaproval.

Denzil flung his pen into the fire.

'It means, that I'd either have something like Art in the house, or I'd shut the place up altogether!'

'Art!' echoed Beltran impatiently. 'Where's the use of talking about Art? The company won't play it, and the public won't come to it.'

'Well, shut the house up then.'

'And turn those forty pair of fine legs out of work? For shame, Denzil,' said Dudley Moore. 'What a churl you must be to put such thoughts in his head! The piece will do admirably. Don't mind his nonsense, Mr. Lance. You change the play, as I say; and if Worth makes for Mrs. Delamere, and somebody puts her in good humour by sending her some new jewels; and Beltran invites a dozen of the right men to dinner on the first night; and if those new scent fountains play in the private boxes and on the staircases; and if the plot is carefully confused so that none of the press-men can make head or tail of it, and thus are driven back in despair to praise the dresses and the drawing-room sets for which your theatre is always distinguished, why, I will undertake to say that you will have a good run all through the season!'

'Yes,' laughed Beltran, 'and the next week's edition of the *Midas* will take *Vivia's Secret* as an example of the utter degeneracy and absolute foolishness of the English stage in the Victorian era!'

'Ah, that may be!' said the editor placidly. 'But, my dear Vere, if my advice fill your house, my staff may well be allowed to cut-up your actors. If you let them murder a fine piece, would you be any the safer from the *Midas?* —even though the emptiness of your theatre made you *look* for once like high Art?'

'That's a fact!' sighed Beltran. 'Well—fire away, Mouse. As it's to be all dresses and drawing-room sets, it can't tax your brains over-much.'

The Mouse obeyed; and three weeks later *Vivia's Secret* was brought out and became the talk of the town. Mrs. Delamere's dresses were pronounced divine; the cabinets in the salon scene were really of marqueterie; one of the scenes was a real luncheon, with real champagne cup and real things to eat; the carpet on the stage was a genuine Aubusson; gallons of perfume danced away every night in the fountains; the plot was profoundly incomprehensible; the action delightfully rapid; and every one had the pleasure of feeling that the heroine was as immoral as

possible, yet that by a judicious dual use of the marriage-service she admirably contrived to avoid shocking the most delicate susceptibilities.

Dudley Moore chuckled: and a stinging satire on it duly appeared in the *Midas*. But the satire only sent people more eagerly to the box-office of the Coronet, and had no other appreciable effect.

Indeed, this anglicised version of *Le Péché de Vivienne* was so entirely successful that the stalls were filled, even before the burlesque: an unprecedented occurrence which, as Fanfreluche told me, rendered Laura Pearl's temper absolutely unbearable, and caused her to break her ivory hair-brush upon her maid's shoulders.

CHAPTER XX.

LA REINE COCOTTE.

The theatre was one of my greatest amusements.

I soon understood the fascination which that peculiar form of ruin possesses for men, and the attraction that draws your nobles and gentry to play the part of impresario.

Your wares are pretty women; your business is amusement; your patronage is extensive; your society is of that easy sort which lets you keep your hat on your head; smoke with your female companions; show you are bored when you feel so; and wear your shooting-coat in the drawing-room both actually and allegorically.

All that is disagreeable in it—all the agreements with male players, all the ill-tempers of female ones, all the debt and credit accounts, all the law difficulties with irate authors, and all the practical worries of the whole thing—you can entirely delegate to your acting manager, whose name alone appears before the public. To be sure, for this form of diversion you will be likely to lose your entire fortune in something less than three years; but then, as in many of your pursuits—the turf or the cards to wit—it is quite possible to lose it in three days, or even

three hours, this objection is hardly to be urged against amateur-lesseeship for a moment. It is true also that you will get tired of it very soon; and then you will find its nets so cleverly woven around you that you will be unable to get out of them. But this, again, is so universal a characteristic of all your pleasures in which women are concerned, that it is scarcely worth while to mention it against theatres in particular.

It is further true that, after amusing the public for several seasons, after benefiting a great number of human beings by your employment of them, after behaving very generously and charitably in hard winters to your poorer employés, after honestly doing your best to bring something like Art on the stage, and after seeing your ancestral acres melted in an actress's diamonds, and your manager and treasurer retire with a villa and an easy competence—you will be within an ace of your entire ruin, and will be condemned by society *in toto* as a *roué*, a brute, and an idiot.

But—if you do not mind these little trifles—to play at being an impresario is perhaps the best fun there is out. You are in all things like the mover of the automaton chess-player hidden beneath the table, and laughing in your sleeve to hear the silly crowds agape with wonder at your marionettes. There is only this difference: the chess automaton is honest and don't take his master's money; *your* automata, when they see that the game is all up, will make a clear sweep of the board before you have touched a brass coin.

These reflections, however, did not trouble me, nor Beltran either. There was plenty of money then, whatever there would be afterwards; and the Coronet, with all that appertained to it, was in its way very amusing.

The *sous les cartes* of everything always is amusing. Pardon this ungrammatical jumble of two languages; in my time I have associated with so many English adapters of Parisian plays.

There was plenty of diversion; as for the virtues, I suppose you don't look for them very often in a green-room. Yet you might sometimes, and find them.

'There goes the biggest fool in all London,' said Lord Brune one morning, as he watched Beltran pass down St. James's street.

'Eh?' asked Paget Desmond in amaze; being given to thinking his friend one of the keenest-witted men on the town, in which indeed he was right.

'The *very* biggest fool,' averred Lord Brune solemnly 'Do you know the last thing that he's done?'

'Last thing? No.'

'Well—just this. Know woman that played mother's part in *Vivia's Secret* all first month?—ugly beggar, yellow, grey-haired, and all the rest—woman not worth sixpence?'

'Yes; broke her leg last week in the street. Had to get substitute.'

'Exactly. Well, her boy came crying to Beltran; little wretch, eight or nine; said his mother'd sent him to say she must give up her part for good and all; leg was broke above knee, and she couldn't stir for six months, if ever. Boy made a beast of a row, bellowing. They'd nothing at all to live on. What do you think that ass has done? I got it out of old Wynch. Continued her salary, by Jove! and had her and the boy sent down to the sea, and all the rest of it, at his cost. A woman as ugly as sin, too!'

And Lord Brune went out of Brooks's in immeasurable disgust.

A few hours later, I heard some other men ask Beltran what had become of the old actress that broke her leg in the street.

'How should I know?' he answered them. 'Nobody ever does know what becomes of old women. Women oughtn't, by rights, to live at all after forty; we never look at 'em later than that.'

'They go to workhouses, I suppose?' suggested Fred Orford, with that sort of vague, pensive curiosity with which a connoisseur wonders where all the ordinary china that he only uses for coffee, and does not care to catalogue, goes.

'I suppose they do,' said Beltran. 'It don't much matter. *We've* done with 'em.'

And if he had known that old Wynch had betrayed him to Lord Brune, he would have been much more seriously angered than if he had discovered the gravest of that worthy's secret peculations.

About his faults or his follies people might chatter till

they were tired, for aught that he cared; but for his better deeds he had an almost morbid horror and avoidance of publicity.

'I don't believe you are so bad as people think, Vere,' said Lady Otho Beaujolais to him one day. She was a pretty creature, with whom he had that sort of pleasant harmless platonics which are so common to the present period.

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Don't you, dear? Well, pray don't say so.'

As for Laura Pearl, of course she always took him at his word,—being a woman incapable of any sort of insight into such a character as his,—and I think that his greatest attraction for her lay in the fact that she thought him the incarnation of human heartlessness.

I saw her often.

I never saw her without marvelling by what spells she induced a man of his temper and his taste to endure association with her own coarse, cruel, and mindless life; by what sorcery of personal beauty she persuaded him to forget her ignorance, her brutality, and her avarice.

From the first moment that the blaze of her splendid auburn eyes had flashed over me I had been pursued by vague memories to which I hardly dared give shape and name; from the first hour in which I had beheld her covered with rubies at the head of her banqueting-table I had been ceaselessly haunted by a fancy that took entire possession of me.

For the scent of the moors and the dales rang in her voice; the scent of the old pinewoods seemed to come to me as she flung her perfumed hair upon the wind; when she gazed on the shining stones of priceless girdles, carbuncle-studded, there was in her eyes the look I had seen given at the 'dimonds' of Dick o' the Wynnats' pack; and when there floated in the gaslights the golden and gossamer tissues of her stage attire, they half veiled and half revealed the same form that I had used to behold imprisoned in the russet garb of a ragged linsey, as the whiteness and the softness of the almond are shut in by their fibrous shell.

I felt sure, and yet I doubted.

The conjurer Gold can baffle even a dog's keen scent and faultless memory,

At last one day I knew.

There was a theatrical question that had brought them all down to the house in the forenoon—a question of whether they should or should not accept Mrs. Delamere's *ultimatum*, which was to have her salary doubled at once or to withdraw from the company altogether. She was entirely wrong legally; but as *Vivia* was then at the height of its first success, and as *Vivia* without Mrs. Dela here would have been in racing parlance nowhere, and as that lady, if coerced into keeping her engagement to the letter, was perfectly capable of breaking it in the spirit by acting so sullenly and so badly that the audience would have been driven away in ennui and disgust, she obtained her own terms in full triumph.

The cabinet council had broken up; a note had been dispatched to Maude Delamere couched in terms to satisfy the utmost exactions of that capricious beauty; Beltran, Denzil, and the rest had gone their own ways; and I, by a stroke of ill-fortune, had got accidentally locked up in that famous supper-room, which served also as council-chamber.

I knew there was no chance of escape, till they came again in the evening, which one or other of them was certain to do; and I composed myself dolefully to slumber away the intervening time. An hour might have elapsed when, to my pleasure, I heard a key turn in the door. I thought it might be some servant whom Beltran, missing, had sent for me.

Instead, I saw Laura Pearl.

How had she entered? He believed that he alone could open that room, as he had had affixed to the door a steel lock of very complicated Italian workmanship, of which he possessed the sole key. I presume she must have had a skeleton key made, and that his antique fastener was not of such mysterious manufacture as he supposed.

She entered, admitted old Wynch after her, and closed the door with her key.

'Get to business,' she said curtly, seating herself by the table.

He seated himself opposite, and obeyed.

Unperceived, where I was curled up on one of the couches, I listened in horror.

The wicked old man, with as dry and simple a commercial exactitude as though he dealt of groceries or calicoes,

detailed to her the various matters in which he was her pander, accomplice, and financier.

Appointments, intrigues, gifts of jewelry, letters of flattery or of folly, careful audits of how much gold such and such poor fools would yield before their final ruin, elaborate estimates as to the probable value of so much gilded youth caught in the toils—all these he laid before her in what seemed a sort of custom of periodical auditory, received her instructions, and proffered his advice, having in all between them but two simple objects—to make money and to cheat men.

She listened attentively, answered with that curious shrewdness which often accompanies complete intellectual ignorance, thrust the presents and the letters into her carriage-bag to be examined at leisure, and began and ended the conference with that good humour and brevity which perfect harmony between two confederates alone can bring about.

As Avice Dare had conspired with the Pedlar of the Peak, so did Laura Pearl conspire with the Pandarus of the town.

As her solitary object then had been the amassing of silver and the betrayal of her brother, so her solitary object now was the amassing of gold and the betrayal of her lover.

It is a terrible thing to corrupt a woman—ay, so it is; but it is a more terrible thing when Nature has made a woman so corrupt that no fiend, if there were one, could teach her aught of evil.

She dismissed him at last carelessly, but good-humouredly, as a clever workman lays down a clever tool.

'I forgot one thing,' said the old man, returning a pace or two. 'The old woman in Shoreditch wants ten shillings a week for the boy. She says now he is over three years she cannot afford to keep him for six.'

She listened with an angry gloom on her face.

'Ten shillings is a deal for the keep of a brat,' she muttered, turning round and round on her finger a sapphire ring, worth a king's ransom in the old days when kings were deemed things of worth.

'So it is,' said old Wynch dryly, with a gleam of humour in him. 'It is almost as much as the keep of a parrot.'

The sarcasm passed by her unfelt.

'He's sure to go on living, I suppose?' she asked, sullenly.

'Well—yes,' said the old man with a smile. 'Some children will, you know. I suppose bad air, and sour milk, and mouldy bread, and bruised flesh, and the stench of those bone-boiling places agree with 'em. Seems as if they did.'

'What do you mean? I'm sure the woman's good enough to him,' she answered sharply, as if a momentary touch of conscience smote her.

'O, very good,' said the old treasurer, with his queer smile. 'She's so fond of children: she's got thirty all in one attic to take care of; she's a true Christian, that woman. Shall I say she shall have the ten shillings a week? If a child dies when it is out to nurse, it is always a nasty business. There are inquiries, and a great deal of nonsense talked about "neglect" and "abandonment" and all that.'

'Very well; she shall have the ten,' she said reluctantly; 'but not a farthing more, mind—not never.'

'I'll tell her so,' said Wynch; and he went out with a pleasant-spoken farewell.

Laura Pearl remained behind him, locking herself in, and spelling through some of the notes, and testing some of the gems she had received through the good offices of this unlovely Mercury of sixty years.

She had made at least a score of rendezvous—one at her milliner's, one at her florist's, one in Kensington Gardens, one in Richmond Park, one in the coffee-room of the Leviathan, one in this very room of the Coronet. And to preserve them all from collision or misadventure, and above all, to time and arrange them so that none of them should be known to Beltran, required as much ingenuity and precision as your betting-book requires from you.

It is true, she had one great thing to help her; she knew all his ways and hours and habits, and through her spies and his servants knew quite well all his movements when he was away from her.

Men object to the surveillance of a wife, and most justly; but they seem to forget that it is nothing compared to the unscrupulous espionage of a courtesan.

She was some little time occupied in arranging her book

of engagements; for though she seemed to have a system of marks and crosses that she herself understood, all usage of pen or pencil appeared strange and awkward to her.

This business at length completed, she shut up her morocco bag, and took her burnous from the chair to depart; doing this she saw me for the first time, and caught me up with a quick gesture of dislike; no doubt to torment me in my master's absence.

The sun was shining strongly through the window by which my couch stood, and as she seized me, the light gleamed on that little ring of white metal that Ambrose of the Forge had graven with my name, and which I still wore about my throat.

It caught her sight fo the first time.

She grew suddenly pale—for she had no need of rouge upon her rich and ruddy skin—and the blood came and went strangely in her face. She stared intensely at me, spelt the letters on my collar slowly, over and over and over, then flung me from her, as though I were an asp.

'It's the pup!' she muttered, as she sank down into the great carved chair. 'It's the beast of a pup! I might have known it!'

Lying where she had thrown me, I grew deadly cold; I also knew her now.

For a second, in her hard splendid eyes there was a look of craven fear, of troubled memories. No living creature is without some conscience; and the fangs of recollection bit now into hers so sharply, that they aroused it for an instant from its gold-drugged sleep.

'Poor Ben! poor Ben!' she muttered. 'Be he alive, I wonder?'

Perhaps she had never thought of him from the time that she had betrayed him until now. It seemed so.

For the instant remembrance held her in its thrall. Beholding the little creature whom she had sold into bondage that she herself might escape to the liberty of sin, she saw again the sheltering rosethorn, the dark mournful yews, the open cottage door, with the brown brook running on its way, the soft peaceful purple hills, the blue kingfisher perched beside the pool, the deep green wood with all the sunlight quivering through, the tender homely face of the man she had betrayed.

The dead time had no beauty for her—O, no. These women are but ashamed that ever they were innocent; they are but fevered and enraged to know that the days ever were when they were poor, and lowly, and of no account. It had been abhorred by her when it had been her present; it was loathed by her now that it had become her past

Yet in a sense it smote her; for a brief space her conscience thrilled with life. Yet not strongly, nor for long.

She shook her hand in the light till it flashed in every facet of her gleaming rings; she looked at her reflection in the old silver mirror of Venice that was opposite her; she cast down her eyes, and gazed upon the diamond locket that rested upon her breast under the soft silks and laces of her dress:—and she laughed. The same laugh with which, tossing her arms above her head, she had beheld herself the mistress of the mock jewels of the old pedlar of the Peak.

'I ha' done well,' she cried aloud in the silence, her native accent strong in her voice in that moment of excitement. 'I ha' done well! If ony Nell o' Moor Farm could see me now!'

Then she thrust her foot against me, and spurned me to the farther end of the chamber, and passed out and away to her carriage.

I heard the shiver of her silk robes on the stairs of the theatre; I heard the chime of her ponies' sleigh-bells through the open window; I heard the rush and roll of the wheels as she dashed down the stone-paved street; and I knew now whence it came, that instinct of terror and aversion which had possessed me. I knew now whence they rose, those memories wherewith her voice, and her eyes, and her cruel beauty had been so strangely weighted for me.

For this woman was indeed Avice Dare.

Perchance it might be urged she would have never found her way to gilded wickedness, had not the old pedlar of the Wynnats first thrown open the door of temptation.

Well, perhaps not; she would only have wedded Ambrose of the Forge, or some other honest-hearted toiler of the woods and moors; and merely dishonoured a name that was of no account, in the brutal orgies of drunken miners

and herdsmen; and only have dwelt, in sullen discontent and savage repining, in a little lowly cottage, that her passions, and her sloth, and her violence should have made a hell to her husband and children. She would have done less injury indeed, because her sphere would have been the village on the moorland, instead of the cities of the world. She would only have broken a poor labourer's peace instead of a score of rich men's fortunes. She would only have been a ragged tipsy virago at an alehouse instead of a splendid cocotte, who swept nobles and gentlemen at will into her net. She would only have been the curse of one unhappy man, about whose neck her sin and shame would have been hung for ever like a millstone, instead of being as now the Circe, into whose fell power there were gathered high names, and proud titles, and fair lands, and lordly honours, to be devoured, or destroyed, or levelled with the swine, or stripped and made a mock of as she would.

O no; there would have only been the common tale of a wretched cottage home, and a female drunkard, and children who quoted the word 'mother' as authority and example for all evil doing, and a woman losing all likeness of her sex through sullen hatred and through dull debauch. Only that.

Imprisoned in the cage of obscurity and poverty, this kite could only have struck gloomily and hungrily at such poor feeble worthless mice, and larks, and night-moths, and other home-bred things to which her native moor had given life. Loosed to full flight, she could pursue all birds of rarest plumage that spread their golden wings out to the sunlight of a glad fair fate; could tear the breast-feathers of the proudest falcon that ever flew; and could dip her thirsty beak into the heart's blood of a score of wild, happy, thoughtless, heedless pigeons, slaughtered on a summer's day to yield her sport an hour.

But would she herself have been more innocent? Not one whit.

If you want a truth (which is not very likely, for it is a ware that is never saleable), take this truth: a woman guilty for the sake of gold would be guilty without gold for sheer love of guilt. When Mephistopheles finds that he can tempt Gretchen with jewels, he is a fool for his pains; he might know that he has wasted his money; she would have been sure to have come to his realm of her own accord —unasked.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WOOD-ELF.

One evening towards the close of the season a misfortune chanced to me. I was lost.

Beltran went down to speak at the Lords—a thing that he scarce ever troubled himself to do—and I, following him without his knowledge, got divided from him in the maze of streets about those legislative houses of yours whose architecture will last just about as long as the laws passed in them will endure—perhaps even a little longer, gimcrack though the architecture may be.

I was sorely grieved and frightened, of course, and ran, and ran, and ran, wildly hither and thither; not knowing any better, and getting under the feet of the horses, and losing all my senses in the din and press.

It was quite late also, and night, although a midsummer night, was coming on apace. I could have found my right road if left to myself; but you always put as many obstacles in the way of a dog's return to his home as in the way of a man's or woman's return to honesty and virtue.

Boys hooted at me; cabmen swore at me; girls chased me; and cats spit at me; and terrified, blinded and deafened with the noise and the pursuit, I had no other thought than to rush away and away at my topmost speed, eluding every grasp, until at length, fairly exhausted, I was caught by the gentle hand of a girl. It stopped me, and stroked me tenderly, so that my terrors were stilled.

'Poor little thing,' she said in a very soft voice that had in it the sound of extreme youth, almost of childhood. 'Poor little thing. Stay with me.'

It was so dark in the little narrow street into which I had unconsciously darted, that I could not see her features; but her touch and her tone reassured me, and I let her lift me in her arms and caress me.

'We are both stray,' she murmured. 'You seem like a little friend.'

Then I felt her tears fall on my forehead, and by dusky moonlight I saw that she bore in her other arm a sheaf of sweet country flowers—bluebells and moss-roses, and other

tender homely blossoms that crown the cottage-walls and meadow-hedges with their beauty.

I suppose she strove to sell them, for standing there she offered them timidly to some passers-by; a few of these thrust them roughly aside; most hurried on without reply; none took them. I wondered how they could refuse that touching mute appeal.

Finding all efforts useless, she turned, with a heavy tired sigh, and went up the little street into another more narrow and poorer still, and opening the little door of one of its desolate houses, entered and passed up its stairway, dark and steep, and smelling foully, to a very small, bare comfortless garret. She put me down upon the floor, and struck a match alight. By the gleam of the little lamp she trimmed, I saw for the first time the face of this flower-girl.

It was excessively lovely—very pale, very sad, but of infinite beauty. It looked wan, as though for want of nourishment; the bow-like mouth had little colour; and the large eyes, of that gray which burns dark as night, had heavy circles under them. Her weighty yellow hair was coiled simply about her head, and her black dress was russet-hued from age and well-nigh threadbare. She was very poor, it was easy to see, and by the thinness of her transparent cheeks it seemed as though she had not tasted good food for many a day; but she was very young, sixteen years at most, and was lovely despite all the cruel antagonism of poverty and sorrow.

Who could she be? All alone, thus, in the heart of London.

I, who had seen life in the green-room of the Coronet and the chambers of Vere Beltran, knew at a glance that this girl was proud by instinct and most pure in innocence.

Yes; though she had been out in the gas-lit streets at ten of the night, and only sold poor drooping thirsty flowers that no one cared to buy.

She poured some water from the broken pitcher for her faded harebells and moss rosebuds; and laid me on a corner of her bed; and put out her lamp, for economy's sake, no doubt, and undressed herself and knelt down to her prayers.

I do not know why it was; but as I saw the linen fall off her delicate slender shoulders, and the yellow rippling

hair fall down almost to her feet—as I saw her kneel there with her hands folded on her bosom, and that look upon her face which Sant has given to the prophetic child of Israel—I thought, curiously enough, of Avice Dare as I had once seen *her* when she had sought her couch, with that wicked triumph in her own bared charms, and that wicked discontent within her soul, flinging herself upon her bed without a thought of prayer, with only a muttered savage word because her beauty was unseen of men, and her sleep was taken on a rude flock-pallet.

This child's eyes filled with tears, and her chest rose and fell with sobs as she knelt; the moonlight, the one unstained thing that a city could not pollute, came streaming in upon her, and seeking this creature who also was incorrupt amidst corruption; the quarters tolled often whilst she prayed there, and yet I do not think her prayers were for herself, for I heard oftimes the murmur, 'Harold, Harold, Harold.' After a while she came and stretched her young limbs on the hard narrow canvass bed; her eyes closed with a long breath that still was a sob; and—so merciful is even sorrow to all youth—that before long she slept, and, by the look upon her face, dreamed peacefully.

She awoke early, at sunrise, and caressed me with gentle little hand that was very white and very thin. When she was dressing she looked sadly at her flowers. Despite all her care of them, they were dead. Bluebells are the shortest lived of all flowers, once gathered; they are little gipsies, though such modest ones; they must have the freedom of their green wood and their hedgerow; bring them beneath roofs, they perish.

Cage robins and gather bluebells, they both surely die; they are the innocent bohemians of the forest and the lane.

'I have nothing to give you unless you will eat dry bread?' she said to me, breaking off for me a piece of a stale loaf that seemed the sole contents of the little cupboard in her attic. Now, I had dined late, and was not yet hungry, and I abhorred dry bread; but lest she should deem me ungrateful or dainty, I scratched my throat with a few of the rough morsels. If you have not seen a dog force himself to eat something he dislikes because he fears to vex the feelings of the giver by refusal, you are a very poor observer.*

* I have seen it.—Ed.

Whilst I was eating it, the door was thrown violently open, and on its threshold stood a stout, red-visaged, untidy woman of fifty or thereabouts.

'Where's my rent?' she demanded fiercely.

The girl's pale cheeks grew paler still, but she looked calmly and fully in the infuriated face that was turned upon her, though her voice trembled a little as she answered.

'I am so sorry. No one would buy anything of me yesterday. And, as I told you, I have not a penny left. But if you will kindly have patience—'

'Patience!' echoed the virago. 'I've had a deal too much patience with such muck as you. A comin' into honest folks houses without a shillin' to bless yerself—a sellin' nasty weeds in make believe to look a trade—a takin' bed and board like a thief a knowin' you can't pay for it! Patience! I'll hev patience! Giv' me what yer owe, or I'll send for the police this minnit!'

The child grew ashen pale now, and her limbs shook; but her eyes did not lose their resolute frank clearness, and she answered firmly still.

'Indeed—indeed—I paid you every farthing till this week. You know I did. And if I could only find my brother—'

'Yer brother! Gammon o' yer brother,' yelled the woman, coming farther into the chamber. 'Stow that trash. I've had enow of it. Go and tell that rubbish where you please, yer poor pitiful white-faced mawther, but don't think to come over *me* no more with it. It's a pack of lies—'

'It's true!' The colour flashed back into the the girl's face and her eyes gathered a sudden deep fiery glow.

'Lies or no lies, it ain't nothin' to me. I ain't to be done no more by it. Out ye shall pack, with the constables to look after yer, if ye can't give me my money. Give me my money! Give me my money!—'

'I cannot give you what I have not.'

She spoke with a strange dignity in one so young, and the passion of the vixen had not power to break her self-command.

'Then yer'll hev to make it,' yelled the woman. 'Will yer go in the streets and make it? Yer well favoured enow, if ye waren't so shabby dressed and so white i' the gills!'

'I will go on the streets if you will let me,' answered the child, not comprehending the base question. 'But I have

no money to buy fresh flowers! and only look—who will buy these? they are quite dead!'

'And I wish you was dead along of 'em!' shrieked the fury, made more violent by the innocence of the answer. 'I'd have the shower o' hair off yer head anyhow, then, and make a penny by that. Th' idee o' comin' and using o' honest victuals, and honest folk's beds, and cheers, and tables, without so much as a bit o' linin to leave behind yer as yer payment. Ye'd a box when ye come, and it's dratted empty now, for I looked in't last night, and there wasn't nothin' but a nasty mouse a' gnawin' at the lid.'

'I have sold what I had, to pay you for the last three weeks,' the girl replied to her, quietly still, and with a certain pathetic pride.

'O, yer have?' retorted her tormentor; 'and ye hain't got a mossel o' nothin' then, let alone the rags on yer back? Well, then, to jail ye'll go, my lass, and that as sure as you're a impident, lyin', white-livered hussy as ever crept into a honest house to—'

'This will bring you your due,' the girl said coldly, and from where it was hidden in the bosom of her dress she drew out a little old-fashioned round gold locket, and tendered it silently to her torturer. It was given in silence, given with a singular firmness and reticence of all emotion; yet there was that in her face which made me fancy that to part with the little locket was worse to her than to part with her life.

The woman clutched it thirstily, with the ruthless greed of her cormorant class.

'A bit o' pinchbeck!' she muttered, biting it, smelling it, testing it as best she knew how; it was genuine gold, however, and she was compelled to admit thus much to herself.

'It ain't worth half you've had this week,' she said sullenly. 'But it 'ull dew. I'll no send yer to jail if ye'll trape off this minnit; and here—here's tuppence to get yerself a loaf with; nobody sha'n't say as I deals hard with yer, though ye've took me in shameful, and I a poor lone woman.'

The girl took up her little straw hat with one hand, and myself with the other.

'The locket is worth twenty shillings, and what I owe you is but six. God forgive you if you were ever so wicked to my brother as you have been to me.'

Then without even glancing at the copper coins which the

subdued virago, in a sort of stupid shame and gloomy wrath, held out to her, she went away down the narrow dusky staircase, and through the low door, into the street.

It was a beautiful summer morning; the sun was radiant even in that dreary place, making indeed its squalor, and its unloveliness, and its grimy outline, more hideous and more desolate.

Sunrise is beautiful in the country; but in the by-ways of a filthy city it is only sad—ay, and even fearful. Night pityingly covers, with its cool gray shade, that scrofula of brick, and mud, and dirt, and vileness, with which men have defaced the sweet fair face of nature; but the sunrise only shows in their uttermost nakedness those throbbing festers of the earth which your mad humanity exalts as triumphs of the tribe of Enoch.

The child went slowly out, and down the narrow road; it was too early yet for any of the closely pent population to be stirring. A footworn cat moved here and there, the sparrows twittered in the gutters, a tired homeless starving dog slunk, shivering, through the warmth of dawn. She, moving like a creature in a dream, walked mechanically where chance took her.

A woman-child alone in a great city—there is nothing more pitiful on earth.

She went on and on, slowly, and dreamily gazing straight before her. Her hands were very cold, and her lips were as white as marble.

Suddenly she paused, with a quick gasping breath; her frame shook with a feverish shudder; her eyes closed, and she reeled against the stone wall by which she stood. The next moment she sank senseless on the flags.

She fell in a half-sitting posture against the old steps of a deserted house; so that, to any passer-by, it would have looked as though she only rested there and slept.

I, sorely frightened and sorrowful for this young desolate creature, could only cower helpless near her; I knew not my way home, and if I had done so, should not have had the heart to leave her.

She appalled me in her awful stillness. I had never seen death, but it seemed to me that surely I saw it now.

I moaned aloud, thinking to summon aid. I did no good.

From a house farther down a woman threw open her lat-

tice, and shouted to me to be quiet, or she would brain me with a bit of wood. A young slender man, with his hands folded upon a book that bore a red cross on its cover, passed by on the other side; he paid no heed to my sad cries; doubtless he was on his way to early matins, and was too absorbed in thinking of his own salvation to have an ear for me.

Presently there came into the street a cheery, ruddy, stout-built woman with shining brass pails on either side of her, whose metal clang resounded through the silence, and brought the cats out from the area rails, eyeing her expectantly. There was no one up to receive her in any one of the quiet little houses of the street; and she filled, from her milk-pails, each one of the jugs, or pots, or tin-cans, which were set out on the doorstep, against her coming, in that curious trustfulness of each other which the poor so often show, in such marked contrast with their acrid suspicions of the rich.

These pots and cans were, for the chief part, covered, but in one or two the cats dipping their noses, had a feast; and one unlucky puss, being unable to withdraw her head, set forth full gallop in her prison, raising a loud clatter with the pitcher on the pavement, and banging it to and fro till she released herself.

Even at that moment I could not but think how like she was to a human being caught by the neck in the jug of his poverty, after drinking up all the cream of pleasure; but from about the cat's head the earthen jug did at length break, falling away in a thousand pieces: who amongst you ever releases himself from the iron pot of debt?

As the woman drew nearer to us, I gathered hope that she would stop and take some pity, for her face was a broad and homely, and pleasant one; and she had the tan of the Berkshire sun still on her skin, and the accent of the Berkshire people still in her voice. But I was disappointed.

She glanced at the recumbent figure, indeed, but she only turned aside so as not to step on it.

'More muck o' bad gells!' muttered this comely-looking sun-bronzed Pharisee, with her pails—thus passing on with judgment.

Her cry soon echoed down a distant street.

I awaited with a trembling heart, powerless and very sad.

After a little while I heard a suddenly swift pattering of feet, the rush of a large breathless body, the panting of an eager, creature and round a corner in full speed came the form of a big brown dog.

Emaciated, dust-covered, footsore, I recognised him in a moment:—it was Bronze.

He threw himself on the girl's form; he kissed her frantically, he moaned over her, he lashed her with his tail in a paroxysm of idolatry and joy; he never saw me, but I did not need one glance from him to tell me who his darling was.

Wakened from her trance by his rough rapturous embraces, the child Gladys slowly raised himself, gazing at him with dim eyes that were unconcious of him, and of herself, and all around her: then she put out her hands feebly, and felt and grasped him by his loose brown curls: then started and looked at him with a strange fixity of gaze. At last, with a cry that pierced my heart, she flung her arms around him, and buried her face upon his neck, and wept in a very passion of tears. 'O Bronze, dear Bronze, good, precious Bronze!' she murmured wildly. 'You are come, you are come!—then he is near!'

Bronze crouched in silence at her feet.

'He is here? He is well? O, tell me, Bronze,' she gasped. 'Dear, dear Bronze, *do* tell me!'

Bronze could only gaze at her with tender hazel eyes, that seemed to look love into her very soul.

'Take me to him, Bronze!' she cried. 'This moment—this moment! Look! I am quite strong!'—and she darted to her feet, and stood erect, quivering all over with hope and dread and longing.

Bronze crouched again at her feet, as though to entreat pardon for a disobedience he could not help: and moaned—a piteous heart-broken and heart-breaking moan.

She sank down once more, being far weaker then she knew, and on her face there came a ghastly terror.

She seized him, and held him, and gazed into his eyes.

'Bronze—Bronze!' she gasped. 'O God!—is he dead? You are alone!'

Bronze lifted his head, and sent forth on the still morning air a long wail of anguish, terrible as the Irish coronach over an open grave:—then down he crouched afresh before

her, and silently caressed her feet, her hands, her dress, her hair.

She knew the meaning of that one long note of woe; and without a cry, without a sign, she fell back senseless on the stones.

There came down the street at that instant a girl who sang as she went a snatch of a music-hall ballad.

The voice was fresh and gay and very full of melody, the mirthful slang words rang out in strange contrast with the gloom and the silence around her. She was a pretty creature with flushed cheeks and round limbs, fantastically though cheaply attired, whilst her chestnut curls were tumbled in picturesque disorder out of a tiny Watteau hat with a bunch of moss-rosebuds in its front. At a glance I recognised in her the little Wood-Elf of the Coronet's Burlesque. Would a little dancer of hornpipes and singer of slang songs be more merciful than the pious youth on his way to his canticles, and the buxom milk-woman with her swift judgment?

Little Courcey was coming no doubt from some casino-ball or theatrical supper, that had been prolonged till sunrise, and the devil himself would be strong in her, and utter through her mouth some coarse and cruel jest.

As she approached her eyes fell on the child Gladys and on Bronze, who was vainly trying all he knew to recall his recovered treasure to life and consciousness. She looked, paused, then crossed the street.

'Mercy on me! what is the matter?' she cried. As none of us gave answer, she stooped and raised the girl's insensible form against the steps, and loosened her dress, and fanned her with her little hat. These efforts failing, she darted swiftly, with more regard for charity than honesty, towards one of the little milk jugs standing before the door of the nearest house. It was a slender white china pitcher, and she forced its mouth between Gladys' lips, and poured some of the still warm liquid down her throat.

After a few moments it revived her; her eyes opened with a dull streamy stare in them. Through want, and exhaustion, she was still unconscious of where she was or of what had happened.

'Are you better, dear?' asked the Wood-Elf very kindly, 'can't you hear me? won't you speak?'

'I do not know,' she muttered. 'He is dead,—he is dead.'

'Who is dead?'

Gladys put her hands to her temples, and gazed about her with the look of a hunted deer.

'He is,—look!—Bronze would never have left him, and Bronze is all alone. He must be dead, you know, he must!' In the simple words there was an unutterable heartbroken certainty of an irreparable woe. Nellie, quick of thought, answered to the truth as she guessed it.

'Are you only sure "he" is dead because the dog is alone? That is no proof. Dogs stray, or are stolen, very often. Do not think "he" is dead only from that.'

The girl glanced up at her with eyes in which a swift radiance of sudden hope shot through the dulness of stupified senses. Then her lips quivered, and she burst into a passion of tears; the spirit which tyrannous and vulgar brutality could not bend broke now at the first touch of kindness.

Nellie let that tempest of grief somewhat exhaust itself then she spoke again.

'My home is close by here. Come along with me if you can walk; you are not fit to be out in the streets. Or shall I go home with you; is it far?'

'I have no home.'

'None! then come along with me and rest a bit. We will see for "him" afterwards, whoever he is. Come along. I live close by.'

Gladys strove to rise.

'You are very good,' she said gently, as she lifted her hands to her forehead again, and looked about her with that pitiful, wondering, uncomprehending look. Her limbs trembled; she had very little strength, and scarcely any knowledge of where she was or of what she said.

'Come, then,' said Nellie simply, and she took her hand in hers, and half led, half supported her through that street and the next, Bronze and I following them close at hand. He had made no objection or opposition to the Wood-Elf's possession of his treasure, nor had he as yet taken any notice or given any recognition of myself.

Where Nellie went was to a vegetable shop in a little street to the left of the one in which she had found us. It was a small place, dingy, dusky, smutty from the sacks of

coal that were also sold on the small premises; but with a certain fresh and pleasant smell from cabbages, and lettuces, and lemons, and thymes, that brought vaguely to my senses the memory of the little herb-garden in the Peak.

Early as it was the shutters were down, and a white-haired, brown-faced old woman was washing some sage and marjoram in a wooden bowl of water.

'Lawk a mussy, Nell, why when'll be a bed next?' she cried, catching sight of her late returning wanderer. 'Ten to six, as I live; I doan't like it, I doan't like it.'

'Don't you, grandmother?' said Nell indifferently. 'Well, I do, and that's all about it. Do the kettle boil yet?'

'Kittle was on the bile beautiful half-a-hour agone, but she's off agen now. Kittles can't be looked for to bile for ever,' responded the old woman with a little asperity. 'In my young days if wenches had come in at six o'clock, after trapezin and flamickin about all night, they'd ha' had to go down on their bended knees 'stead o' axin', like a queen, if kittles biled. But, Lord's sake! who've ye brought in with ye?'

'A girl I know, that wants a bit of breakfast. I met her hard by, a pretty girl, gran', and a deal more respectable than I am. Now, look sharp, there's an old dear, and get me some tea, and put a dash of the craythur in it, for I'm dead tired, and so is she.'

And Nellie therewith half-drew, half-forced, up the stairs into a little room at the head of them, the still half-senseless, half-stupified form of Gladys. Bronze and I followed of course.

'Dogs!' screamed the old woman below, 'two dogs, Nell—Nell—them, nasty, dusty, ugly beasts sha'n't go up my clean boards.'

But we were up, on the newly-scrubbed stairs, and Nell called out with careless answer to the clamour that the dogs might do as they liked, her grandmother wasn't to bother.

The little chamber, like all about the place, was scrupulously clean: it was a small square white-washed room, with deal furniture and a truckle-bed, and a latticed window, that looked out dolefully on chimneys and on roofs. But there were touches of grace about it, despite its

nakedness, as there were about Nell herself, despite her impudence; about the little window the golden-drop creeper grew out from a pot, and 'made a sunshine in that shady place.' There was a canary in a bright brass cage, canopied with white-blossomed chickweed and the amber tufts of groundsel. There was a heap of bright-hued things in a corner, which, though only the trumpery satins and tinfoil glitter of stage costumes, still made a glow of colour and a shine of silver. And on the bed was a short full skirt of rose-hued tarlatan, that was fresh and dainty and unworn, and gave something of the grisette's grace to the barren attic. This new ball-robe Nellie cast aside, as roughly as though it were an old piece of sacking, and with a gentle force pushed her guest down upon the pallet, and bade her lie there and not speak.

Gladys obeyed, her senses still but half-awake and incapable of resistance; and Bronze, flinging his huge form on the bed at her feet, kept watch and ward over her safety.

In and out of the room the Wood-Elf darted, some half-dozen times, noiselessly always, and brought by degrees tea and toast, and bread, and a cluster of round radishes white and smooth as ivory, and a green fresh crown of dewy cress. All the while the voice of the old woman below was grumbling, in a running chorus of blame and of complaint; but Nellie paid no heed. Indeed, as I learned later, she was justified in this, since her money paid the house and all that was therein.

Vainly did she entreat the girl Gladys to touch food: she could not eat. Food was loathsome to one who had been without it for four-and-twenty hours, and who for a month past had well-nigh starved. Not so her good Samaritan, who, having eaten four hours earlier a hearty supper of lobster, oysters, ices, and confectionery, attacked with a will the radishes and bread-and-butter. The infusion of brandy in the tea, which she had put unknown to her young wayfarer, acted like a soporific on the child, who probably had never tasted the spirit in her life. It flushed her face, it warmed her chill and trembling limbs, it made her eyelids heavy, and drop with sleep, against her will or even her knowledge.

Deep dreamless slumber, like the slumber of an infant,

came over her, and she lay on the narrow bed with all that beautiful unconscious colourless repose you see in a dead child who has died painlessly.

Bronze, crouching nearer, and also refusing all offers of food, since they involved the leaving of his post, stretched himself on guard.

Nellie, munching her radishes as rabbits munch clover, sat and looked at her wish curiosity.

'By the looks on her she'd do for the profession,' the Wood-Elf muttered to herself. 'But I guess she'd go and break her heart in it, as that D'Eyncourt woman did. You honest loyal thing,' she went on, laying a quantity of broken bread beside Bronze, 'your bones are half through your skin, and you're fairly perished, and yet you'll go without eating rather than leave *her*. Hang me, if you dumb uns don't beat us hollow!'

Then, without noticing me, she threw off all her finery, dipped her face in a pan of cold water to take the rouge off, wrapped herself up in an old blanket, and, curling herself up in a corner of the room, was soon fast asleep like a dormouse.

In something less than three hours, by the tolling of the clocks, she awoke. All women are not at all pretty when they awake; some look very stupid, some very cross, some very pallid and untidy; but Nellie looked pretty, with her cheeks as red as roses and her eyes as blue as forget-me-nots, and her chestnut waves of hair all tumbled, and her ruddy mouth half-pouting and half-yawning.

She splashed about in her cold water like an otter or a salmon; came out of it ruddy and fresh, and dripping like a rose in a shower. Then she dressed herself very softly, wrote on a big card with great, sprawling, ill-formed letters, '*You are with a friend; do not fear!*' put the card where the sleeper's eyes would fall on it if they unclosed, and then left the room, locking the door from without.

'What d'ye know o' that wench up-stairs? Next to nothing, I'll be bound,' I heard the old woman's grumbling voice ask as she went down.

'Less than nothing, Gran,' the Wood-Elf answered gaily. 'But I'll wager she's a good girl, and that's more than I am!'

'Y're good enow,' grumbled the old dame, 'if yer

wouldn't stop out so long a nights; and if yer wouldn't spend such a power o' money on yer victuals and yer finery; and if ye wouldn't be allays a givin' credit to all them trapezin poor as asks yer, and a wastin' apples and nuts and pennorths o' baccy on all the young uns and the old uns o' the street.'

The Wood-Elf only laughed, and (by the more distant echo of the laugh) disappeared, I think into the street.

As for me I was in high dudgeon to be unrecognised and pent in durance like this; and Bronze would not enter into any sort of converse, nor permit me to utter a sound or move a limb, lest I should disturb the sleep of Gladys.

I felt deep interest in her; I could not help it; but I also wanted greatly to return to Beltran, and I thought with a sort of anguish of the delicious minced chicken on which his servant was wont at this hour of the day to regale me. One's regrets for a lost friend are never so poignant as when that loss also entails a limitation of one's daily dainties.

So I withdrew myself in a corner and sulked, having an erroneous notion, caught up from human-kind, that sulkiness was a fine vindication of dignity.

With noon the Wood-Elf returned, having been down, I daresay, to the theatre in that toilsome routine which forms the most laborious part of the profession. To skip and sing and spout at night in the blaze of the light, with the stimulus of the crowded house, and the flattery of the clapping hands,—that is well enough, even when one is not a star but only a little fifth-rate performer with a guinea a week. But to tramp down to the house at noon, in snow, or rain, or heat, or tempest, and go through all the dreary repetitions in the ugly darkened daylight; to be scolded by shrill voices, and to be pushed about by rough hands, and to stand until your legs ache while scenes are shifted and elaborate sets are arranged,—ah, think twice, my good maiden, unless indeed you be a Rachel or a Mars, before you refuse the comely village-carpenter's marriage-troth, or leave the old father's mill-house in the woods, or fling away the homely peace of life on the moor farm, for *this*.

Gladys once during her absence had awakened and started and gazed about her, then beholding Bronze and reading the kindly words on the great card, had sighed

and smiled as in a dream, and fallen once more into slumber.

The opening of the door aroused her now, and aroused her fully.

She sprang up on her bed, and turned her beautiful wild eyes on Nellie.

'Who are you that are so good to me? And where am I? And how is he? And why is Bronze alive, yet all alone? O tell me? Pray do tell me!'

Nellie sat down beside her and regarded her with perplexity. She scarcely knew what was best to say; and she was absorbed in gazing with all her might at this creature, still younger and far more desolate than she whom yet she felt was as widely different from her as though she had come from one of those distant worlds of stars which she, who dwelt in the gas-glare of cities, scarce ever even saw.

Gladys caught both her hands.

'O, do tell me! You are so good, and you wrote yourself there my friend. What is it that has happened? and why is Bronze here? and where is Harold?'

Nellie was forced to answer something.

'My dear, I don't know,' she said slowly. 'I found you in the street. You had fainted. I brought you home with me. That's all. Whose dog is Bronze? and who are you?'

The splendid flash of hope paled out of the girl's face. It grew white with vague fear.

'I am Gladys Gerant,' she answered breathlessly; 'and Bronze belonged to my brother, who took him away with him a years ago. And I came to London some weeks since, and I went to the house where Harold had written his last letters, and he was not there. They only knew that he had left them—long ago; and I never have learned more. And Bronze rushed on me to-day, and then I found he was alone. I was sure that Harold must be dead, or the dog would never have left him.'

She spoke in an agony of dread, her slender hands locked hard in one another.

It was an inarticulate slight fragment for Nellie to gather any sense from it. But she had tact, and said the first thing that seemed best to her.

'Dead?—because Bronze is alone? What nonsense, child! Who put such fancies in your head? The best of dogs gets lost over and over again. Why, if he was half as fond of your brother as you says, he'd never have left his grave,—that you may take your word on.'

'That is true,' murmured Gladys. 'You would never have left his grave, would you, Bronze? dear, good, patient, precious Bronze?'

'That I would not could I have found it,' said Bronze's wistful eyes as he listened.

'That he would not,' averred Nellie. 'This Harold of yours is alive—depend on it; the dog got astray somewheres, and smelt you out, as those clever beasts always does. What was Harold?'

'Harold? A poet.'

There was a superb glory and pride on her young wan face as she spoke those words. Nellie, like the practical, shrewd little worldling that she was, gave a significant shrug.

'A poet! Wants a deal o'money to be of that trade! Was he rich?'

'O no. We have been very poor.'

'And he come to town to seek his fortune? And to make a great man of his-self?'

'He came to London for that—yes.'

'And what did you come for?'

'Only to find him.'

'Whew! Without an address!'

'I had that one. But he had not written for so long that I felt certain something had happened. O, something has—something must!'

She hid her face upon her hands, and shuddered. The dim shadow of an unknown woe is worse still than the presence of a calamity whose worst is told.

'Nonsense!' cried Nellie imperatively. 'You must not fret yourself like that. Young men have a hundred different lodging-houses in a twelvemonth. For you to come to look for him in this sort of way is just madness like—you might as well set to look for needles in a bottle o' hay. He might be within a stone's throw of ye, and you never know it. Never think a man dead for that little. We'll try and find him. Poets isn't so common as women;

and I'll ask some gentlemen I know as writes in papers. But come, tell me a bit more about yourself, dear. Are you all alone in this place?'

'I am all alone in the world.'

'Goodness! Well—a many is. Only you look as if you'd never roughed it like. How did it come about, if one may ask?'

Gladys, by one of those strong efforts by which she had restrained all emotion when she had given the locket to her tyrant, looked up with dry, calm eyes, and spoke with a low and steady voice.

'Of course you may ask everything. You have been so good—'

'I aren't good,' said the Wood-Elf pettishly, while the colour sprang ruddily in her cheeks.

'You are to me. That is all I know. It happened in this way: we had a farm in Sussex, such a fresh, lovely, quiet place. My father was never rich; but he was better than rich; so wise, so gentle, so God-fearing, so loving to his men, and to his beasts. I always think that Isaac must have been just such a man as he. And we were very happy—very—though troubles came. You know farming is but uncertain work; the sun, and the wind, and the rain, and the snow, are all its ministers; but they rule very ill for it sometimes. When I was quite a little child I think we had no want; but I can hardly remember the time that there was not some anxiety in the house. My father was very generous, and always gave much to the poor; he could not sit down and break bread for himself knowing that another wanted it within his reach. And the sheep would sicken, and the lambs die, and the wheat rot, and the hops wither—so often, so often! Not from any fault of my father's, but just from the cruelty of things, as it seemed. And yet the life was so happy—at least I thought it so. Harold, I know, grew tired, and chafed because of the stillness, and would leave us, and go forth to make the world ring with his name, as he said. My father took blame to himself because, he said, that it had been his reading aloud of Shakespeare, and Milton, and Massinger, and Ford, and Jonson, and all of them that had first moved poor Harold with this spirit of longing and of unrest. I do not think it was that Harold was born to

dream dreams. But I must not trouble you with this—you only want to know why I am here. Well, Harold left us; and my mother seemed to droop ever after. In a little time she died; of the cold, they said, since she was delicate in health; but I am sure what killed her was the absence of Harold. He was full of grief when he heard of it; but he did not offer to return. Nor did my father press it. "If the lad can do for himself it will be well," he used to say. "To come back hither is to be buried under the timbers of a falling house." He meant by that, things were very ill with us, and that he had no heritage to bequeath to my brother. The land had been mortgaged many a year, had been mortgaged when he came to it by my grandparents. But he had always paid interest to the day; and those who held the mortgages had promised solemnly never to call for more. The year that Harold left us was one of misfortune from seed-time to harvest. The cattle died, the hay failed because of the drought, the hops did not yield, and two of the best horses were struck by lightning; nothing fared well of it all. It was a terrible summer; terrible, and yet so beautiful. Thus at last, my father for once could not pay all the sums that were due, and the mortgagees broke faith with him, and claimed the old house and all the lands. My father was a proud man, and just, and upright; and—it killed him. He died of paralysis, they say; but it was only his heart that was broken. When he was dead they took all. They said that there was nothing for Harold or me; it might be so, I cannot tell. I only know they thrust me over the threshold the first day that he was laid in his grave.'

A convulsive shudder shook her, and the veins of her throat swelled like cords; but she kept calmness still, and ended her tale in a few brief phrases.

'A woman who lived in a village near took me to her home through the winter. A good, old, tender creature, blind, to whom I read, and for whom I wrote. She said my father had been good to her in her youth. But when the spring came I could not live on her charity. It was not possible. I served her in the rough cold season; but with the bright weather a young niece of hers always arrived, and then I knew she could really need me no more. Besides, I longed to see Harold. So I came hither. I had

a little money; five pounds in silver that my godmother once had saved for me, all in bright sixpences, and I thought it would last well enough till I had found my brother. But you see, it went so little way. It was almost all gone, it seemed, in a week or two. Then I bought some flowers and tried to sell them; but I did not get again so much as I paid for them; and—and—the people were so rude, so jeering, so cruel. And at last I had no money, and the woman of the house turned me out, and—there is no more to tell. Only that now I have found Bronze all alone, I am sure that my brother is not with the living.'

She ceased, and was very still; still with that quiet of absolute grief which is far more intense in its desolation than all more passionate and eloquent emotions.

Nellie had listened with great tears gathering in her bright eyes that had the sunny azure of the little cuckoo's-eye flowers.

She was touched, she was awed, she was subdued, she was for once at a loss for all words.

'Don't wed yourself to that fancy, dear,' she said softly at last. 'Maybe after a bit the dog will help you to find him. As I telled you, them poor beasts never leave their masters' graves; and it's more like by far that Bronze have been stray. Whose dog's that other little white un that was with you?'

'One that I found last night. And now,—may I not know who you are that have been so good to me?'

The Wood-Elf flushed a little hotly under the short locks of auburn that fell over her forehead in thick waving fringe.

'My name's Nell Browne. Leastways I was baptised so in the poorhouse. My mother came tramp, they say; she died the day I was born, locked up, I think, in a sort of a damp hutch. Nobody knew she was in trouble till they looked in in the morning and found me—and her dead. There's a many dies that kind of way. They never knew no more about me, nor who my father was. I dare say he wasn't no good. So it don't matter. Gran' here is no grandmother of mine. They farmed me out to her when I was seven, as a kind of little maid like. The old woman kept a little tea-shop in a village down in Berks;

and she was very good to me; never beat me; not once. Well, you see, when I grew up a bit I was pretty and lissom: and I thought as I might do better nor go on sweeping out a little sty of a tea-shop all my days. So I bid good-bye to gran', and the noddin' chiney figures, and I come up here to seek my fortune—'

'And they were not cruel to you?'

'Bless you, my dear!' answered Nell hastily, with the colour still hot on her face, and her eyes wandering a little away to the speck of gold that the canary made against the light. '*You're* the sort Life's cruel to—not me. I got all my banging about in the workhouse. I've done pretty well since. You see I've a knack of singing and jigging about, and I've got the go of it in me, and so I took to it natural, as it were, and I've fared very well as things run. I've been five years at it, though you wouldn't hardly think so; I'm twenty come July, and I was fifteen when I left granny and the chiney nodding-men.'

Gladys looked bewildered. 'I don't understand,' she said softly. 'What is it that you do?'

'Stage, my dear,' said Nellie a little curtly; 'the theatre, you know.'

Gladys' eyes opened in mute awe, and radiated with a solemn wonder.

'The stage! What, do you play Beatrice?' she murmured breathlessly, 'and Victoria Corrombona, and the Duchess of Malfi, and Imogene, and—'

'Dear heart, no!' cried Nellie, laughter back on her lips, though her tears were not dry on her cheeks. '*Me* take leading business? Not a bit of it. I just dress as a boy, or a sprite, or a devil, or something queer, and jump about, and sing, and talk balderdash, and look pretty; that's all I have to do. It was awfully hard at first, you know. One could only begin, of course, with penny gaffs, and—'

'Penny gaffs!'

'I beg your pardon; I mean low places of amusement, where the poor people come.'

'Poor people need not be low.'

'O, of course not, but they mostly are. And that's how one has to begin. But that's over now. I'm at a fashionable house, and—and—it's all right enough. A year ago, when I'd made some money, I thought I'd go and have a

look at the tea-shop. So I went down by return one Saturday to the little old village, and I asked after granny. The chiney men was there, nodding fit to kill themselves, and looking as wise as judges; the street was there, and the trees were there; and an old cat, as was our kitten when I first went to sweep out the shop, was there too, a-s inning of herself on the door-step. But poor old gran' wasn't there. She'd come to grief; got in debt, you know; and all the plant and the things had been sold right over her head, and she was living on the parish in the wretchedest old almshouse, hard by the church. So I just said to her, "Come along, gran,' and keep house along of me;" and I took this bit of a place, and set her up in business like, because she's happier thinking as how she does something for her own living. And she's a good deal of use, the old woman is; she gives cads right down facers when they come after me; and it makes it feel a bit like a home, you know, having her, though she's cranky as cranky can be. It's a sort of fancy one has—that of getting a home, when one hasn't had none but a workhouse.'

In the expressive eyes of Gladys Gerant I saw a hundred changes pass whilst Nellie spoke. There was shrinking distaste; there was wondering non-comprehension; there was an instinctive sense of wrong, and yet there were the swift sympathies of a noble nature with that gratitude which had thus paid its debt to an old and helpless creature, and with that wistful desire for a life denied, a love unknown, that thus broke out in Nellie's latest words.

She did not answer for a moment; these two young lives, so widely sundered by training and temper, bewildered one another. They had only the common ground of their mutual trust.

'Are you happier than I, never to have loved any—never to have grieved for any?' said Gladys softly. 'No, I think not; I wish—I wish you had such memories as mine.'

'O God, so do I wish!' cried Nellie with a curious passionate cry; she rose impetuously and crossed to where her canary hung; she felt, I believe, as though she would have died in the streets on the morrow only to have such memories of the beloved dead, as this child possessed and cherished.

'But you see,' Gladys murmured, with a strange sad tender smile on her face, 'I have had all my summer in my spring; it is all over now. There are nothing but the night and the winter. While you—you have had the cold and the darkness first; your sun has yet to dawn.'

Nellie turned quickly and stared at her. She had never heard any one speak like this. 'Are *you* a poet too?' she said suddenly.

'I? O no! Harold could tell what he felt, I can only feel; but I am rested now, I must go. I cannot thank you, only—'

'Go? what do mean to do?'

'I do not know. I am not afraid. God will give me some friend as He gave me you.'

'Nonsense! ravens gobble up worms on their own hook, and sew up the rents in their own nests; they don't go about on heavenly messages nowadays.'

'But *you* must have found friends when you came hither, quite alone?'

Nellie's cheeks flushed. 'That's neither here nor there. Friends! a woman has no friends unless she has two thousand a-year. She has only—but that's no odds to talk about. Just you stay there, stay as long as you like—stay till you are strong; and then we'll set about seeing for Harold.'

'I could not live on your charity.'

There was that singular dignity in the answer with which this delicate, terrified, desolate child had awed her vulgar tyrant; a pride lofty, stainless, incapable of accepting alms.

'Charity!' cried Nellie, quickly catching the tone and translating it aright; 'it wouldn't be no charity of mine. You're so different to me—so gentle-born like, and uses such fair language; and I dessay so clever, and book-learned, and all that. There's a deal you might do for me, for I ain't no scholar; and if I could only read hard words off quicker, and speak 'em with a nicer accent, as it were, why, they all say as I've a deal of talent, and there isn't the least atom of reason why I shouldn't take a much higher line of business. And all that you might teach me; only by being with you I'd pick it up like; and then one day, perhaps, when you've found your brother (for I'm sure as he may be found, and shall be found), he'll write a

great play for me, and I'll make a grand hit in it, and then we shall both say what wonderful good has come of Bronze's hollering out, and bringing of me to you on a spring morning, all by chance like, don't you see?'

Gladys looked at her with a look of infinite comprehension and gratitude.

'I see how nobly you try to make me think your charity a selfishness; but I see no fit return that I could give you for living at your cost, and I must beg of you to let me have my way and go.'

'Go to death or perdition, you innocent creature!' muttered Nell. Then at that instant she caught sight of the collar on my neck, and darted at me, and read the inscription, glad of some diversion, as her eloquence failed of its point. She dropped me on the floor, with that curious disregard of our bones and feelings from which we dogs perpetually suffer, as she read.

'Why, as I live, it's little Puck!' she cried.

'You know the dog?'

'To be sure I do! Why, here's a run of luck: there's five pounds reward out for it this forenoon, offered on handbills in the shops, you know, and one never thought once of this little beast of yours and Puck being one and the same, I was so busy wondering about you.'

'You know its owner too, then?'

'Why, gracious, he's the lord as owns our theatre. Here, I'll take it back this minute to him, and bring you the five sovereigns, and if you pays me half-a-guinea a-week, you'll treat me like a queen, and you can stay on here two or three months, anyhow.'

'Take the dog to him, but do not bring me back any money; I am not a thief, to take payment for honesty.'

'What! But he's offered the five sovs. for the dog; you've a right to it—where is the harm?'

'There may be no harm, but I would not take it. My father would have never let me accept a reward for doing such a little simple thing, so plainly right as that.'

'No wonder your father's farm was swallowed up in mortgages,' muttered Nellie. 'Well, shall I take Puck anyhow, and will you wait till I come back, certain sure?'

'I will, indeed, thankfully. But I beg of you to tell that gentleman that I am very glad to be able to restore

his dog, but that if he were to send me any money, I should at once return it. Do not tell him either that I want money, or he might think himself bound to give it, please remember; I trust you.'

Nellie turned, a little uneasily, from the grave sweet gaze of those thoughtful and pleading eyes—eyes half prayer and half command.

'I'll be careful,' she murmured; 'but I'll go at once, for you aren't strong enough, and I know as he'll be pleased to see the little un safe back.'

And with that she carried me forth, and closed the door once more upon her guest.

'What a queer lot of chances!' she murmured. 'I am at my wits' end, little Puck, what to do for that child. She's a lady bred, if she aren't a lady born; she's not fit for our life; she makes one feel so good-for-nothing like with that look of her two big eyes. I'll tell *him* anyhow, if I can see him; he's generous, and he's a gentleman, and I know he aren't one-half so wicked as they says. Maybe he will do something for her: I never believe he'd go for to hurt her—an innocent thing like a fawn or a kid.'

Then, with myself under her arm and her little rosebud crowned hat on her head, Nellie set forth into the streets again followed by a grumbling valediction from the old woman to the effect that 'gells as was allus a flauntin' and a trapezin abroad i' that fashion, and a takin' of low mawthers to gie 'em bed and board, couldn't look to kip a roof over their heads a week longer, with taters at two shillin' the quarter, and every blessed head of brocoli eyelet-holed wi' worums.' To which dismal prophecy Nellie paid no heed; but wound her way through the streets which led from her own little home in the low purlieus of Westminster, to the aristocratic places wherein the Coronet and its patrons were to be found.

When we reached Beltran's chambers it was six o'clock, and his night brougham with its pair of bays stood before the house; with a certain shyness Nellie, who lost her gardihood with her entrance into his neighbourhood, rang the door-bell.

No sooner was the door opened than I wriggled out of her hold, dashed up the stairs, and bursting through the aparrments, danced and whirled round Beltran, where he

stood before the mirror in his dressing-room. He welcomed me kindly, whilst they told him who desired to see him.

He was already dressed for dinner, and soon passed into his reception room, where Nellie was standing looking for once shy and ill at her ease. Nellie was not promoted to that standing from which a burlesque dancer can hail lords and gentlemen as Fred and George and Jack, as old fellow, and old cus, and old hoss; perhaps because she 'kept straighter than most of them;' the glories of drag-seats and of little dinners were as yet unknown to her; and a peer was to her still only a very great and terrible person. For Nell no brougham waited as yet; no stalls clapped approval with delicate lavender gloves; and no Richmond repast was ever ordered at three guineas a head. She was as yet only a little dancing-girl—unpromoted.

'I am very much obliged to you, Nellie,' said Beltran, as he gave her a kindly good-morning. 'I am glad the dog found so pretty a guardian. Won't you sit down, and have some fruit or some tea?'

Nellie blushed, and fidgeted. The very langour and ease of Beltran's manner—a manner as natural to him as it was to breathe—only increased her unusual perturbation. It was easy, no doubt, to chaff, and flout, and exchange impertinences and puns with young university men or boy-soldiers in at casinos; but it was very much more difficult to her to speak out to and look straight at this thorough-bred, indolent, weary-looking employer, whose consummate insolence, when he was displeased, had, she knew, passed into a by-word even among his own set.

'I didn't find Puck myself, sir,' she murmured. 'It was a young girl as is at mine now, my lord; and she was almost dying this morning; and I took her in, though gran' made a fuss, and she's gentlebred, I'm sure, though it seems as how she be all alone, and hasn't not a shilling in the world; but she told me not to say a word about that to you, because she seems so proud like, and she won't accept of no reward, and she trusted me not to tell, and now I am telling; and I feel so mean, and yet I don't know what to do. She is so helpless and seems so innocent, and with it all she is as proud; and you see, my lord, for a girl like me to work for her living aren't nothing; but this one—'

And Nellie broke down in her flood of disconnected and

involved phrases, stammering very much, and entangled in a web of words. Beltran smiled as he stood by the hearth, but only kindly, with no touch of contempt.

'I don't quite understand. Tell me all about it, Nellie. Don't suppose I'm in a hurry. I dine down at Greenwich to-night, but I needn't start for half-an-hour. Who is it that is too proud to take these five pounds for the puppy?'

Thus encouraged and reassured the Wood-Elf told her own tale, and that which she had heard also. Told it, too, rapidly indeed, and very brokenly, and with not any eloquence save that of feeling, but pathetically for all that, by reason of her quick, ardent, honest sympathies with its subject; and Beltran listened, yielding her far more attention, and indeed more respect, than I had seen him show to the elegant nothings of a marchioness, or the coquettish repartees of an ambassadress.

'And you see, my lord,' continued the girl eagerly, her awe of him fading away in the excitement of her genuine pity and desire to do good, 'my sort of life's well enough for the like of me. I've always roughed it, and I'm fond of the business, and I never was eddicated nor nothing of that kind; but this one,—she may be a farmer's daughter; she says so; but she's a lady, if ever I see one, and she's proud, and so delicate, and so coy-like, she couldn't do as I do, she couldn't. She'd just go mad with the rudeness, and the bustle, and the—the—shamefulness, as one may say. And I haven't a notion what on earth to do for her,—and she won't touch them sovereigns as you've offered for little Puck; and I shall never be able to stop her from rushing off again right into starvation and her coffin, and I thought as how maybe, if it wasn't making too bold, you might take a kind of pity on her, and know some great lady or another as might know of something as would suit her!'

And she paused at last, fairly out of breath, and frightened at her own temerity now the words were uttered. Beltran smiled again.

'Great ladies are not very easy to persuade, I fear, in such cases. But I will do anything that I can for this child you have so generously befriended. She will not take the five pounds, you are sure?'

'No, sir; I am sure she will not.'

'But you can take and use it for her?'

'No, sir, I couldn't. I don't tell a lie well at no time, and I never could tell one at all with her big eyes a watching of me.'

'Well, it is difficult then to help her. Of course if she were fit for the theatre I might give her a place; do you think she would be?'

'She has the looks for it, sir; and she fired up like a wild thing about Imogene and Juliet and that lot. But you see, my lord—I mean—as she'd have to begin—being so poor, and so young, and nobody not knowing about her—as she'd have to begin like I did, just with hard, hard work, and a shilling a night, and a miserable tramp every morning and evening to and fro; she'd die off, I think, of cold, and worry, and hardship. And—and—she's that coy, and dainty and proud; her heart would break on the stage, I think.'

Beltran laughed.

'Do you think hearts break on the stage, Nellie? I don't.'

'I don't know, sir. They says as Mrs. D'Eyncourt's did. I don't suppose there's a many as keeps on the stage as cares a hang; but some few as is drove off of it, as one may say, sir, do.'

'Perhaps so. I never considered the question. If your protégée would not like the stage,—what is her name, by the way?'

'An odd name, sir,—one as don't sound altogether English—Gladys Gerant.'

'Gerant! It is English enough, very old English. Her brother must surely be the same lad that wrote those verses which I—which the world has taken to praising.'

'She did say as her brother were a poet, sir.'

'That is very curious,' murmured Beltran, stirred for the moment out of his habitual indifference to all created things. 'There is not much doubt, I should think, but that they must be the same. However, there is small consolation for her, Nellie, in this: the boy is dead.'

'Dead!' echoed Nellie. 'O, dear heart!—how sorry I am. I have told her so to keep on believing he is alive, and that she'd find him and be happy with him, and all that! Might I make so bold as to ask what you know of him, my lord?'

Beltran walked to the other end of the room, and gave her a pretty green volume.

'Nothing in life,' he said carelessly. 'But these poems are a little the talk of the town, and you see by the inscription that the author is dead.'

Nellie turned the leaves over reverently and helplessly; the dirty pages of Lacy's 'acting-editions' were the only ones she ever strove to read.

'To be clever enough to make a book as big as this, and then die!' she murmured. 'Lord! how sad it seem! I never can tell her; O, I never can tell her! Couldn't I hear somthing of him, sir, where this was printed?'

'I think you had better not try. You see you know nothing of her.'

'O sir!' cried the Wood-Elf eagerly, in her zeal forgetting her awe of him. 'You'd never say them sort of suspecting things of her if you could only look in her face! If ever I see a face as was all innocence, and loveliness, and pride, and light, and sadness like, all mixed up together and changing every minute, I see it now in hers—I do indeed. There's that about her, sir, as do seem to make me feel so common, and so coarse, and so good-for-nought beside her. My bit of a place aren't fit for her, and my talk will only do her harm, and—and—O! I know as every word she says is gospel-true. I'd swear it!'

'I like to hear you, Nellie,' said Beltran kindly. 'It is good and generous of you. I am not doubting in the least. But at the same time you could not satisfy the publishers that she was any connection of this writer's; and if you did there would be very little good in it. Poems never pay: these are no exception to the rule. The town may talk of them; but five hundred people, at the outside, buy them. Leave the matter with me. And until you hear from me again, tell this child that you have lighted on her brother's work at a bookseller's—take her that copy, it may give her pleasure—and persuade her to stay with you till you can hear of him. It is not worth while to tell her he is dead.'

As he spoke he twisted out the front leaf or two which bore the record of the young poet's brief life and death, and handed the volume back to her.

'But what shall I tell her, sir, please?' murmured

Nellie. 'She's not a one as I could tell false to; and she'll ask me, and ask me, and say she won't live on charity.'

'Tell her the truth, then, not all of it, but just so much as this:—That you told me her name, and that I gave you this book and that I will see her myself to-morrow. She will not leave you then, unless she be an utter little fool.'

'She's no fool, sir; but she's dreadful proud.'

'She's all the better for that. Leave me your address. I'll try and get to you at noon.'

''Tisn't a fit place for the like of you, sir; 'tisn't indeed,' stammered Nellie. 'It's nothing but a little old green-stuff shop, and in a horrid part of the town, too.'

Beltran laughed.

'My dear girl, I have been in fifty times worse places, I will warrant. I'll see you at noon.'

Nellie took the hint that her interview was ended, and rose.

"You're very, very good, my lord,' she said earnestly. 'I don't know how to thank you. She'd do it better nor me. I was sure as you was kind and pitiful, though—'

'Though what? Come, out with it!'

Nellie looked for once up in his face, and took courage from its look.

'Why, in the theatre, you know, my lord, they're very afeared of you; and they calls you very hard, and very indifferent, and very full of scorn like. But I never thought that they spoke as was all true about that.'

'Didn't you? Well, I suspect they did. Good-bye. And, for your own share in bringing back that little rascal, do me the pleasure to wear this.'

He tossed lightly into her lap as he spoke a pretty necklet of quaint Roman beads, which lay with other trifles of the sort in an old Vernis Martin dish on a table near him.

Nellie coloured as brilliantly with pleasure as she had done with embarrassment. For a moment she held it, gazing at it in blind bewildered adoration. Then, as though the green scarabæi which were in it had life and sting, and sharply wounded her, she started and shrank a little, and put it quickly down upon the table near.

'If you please, sir—no,' she murmured. 'I'd rather not. I'd rather you'd not think as I could have come for sake of such a thing. I'd nothing to do with finding Puck. Nothing—nothing, indeed.'

And then she turned before he could reply, and darted swiftly from the room, as though if she tarried longer in sight of those glittering scarabæi with their golden clasp, her continence would perish, strangled by desire.

'Wonders will never cease!' said Beltran to himself. 'The town talks of a dead poet instead of kicking him as a dead ass;—a dog comes back without a thief catching hold of him;—and one of my dancing-girls refuses to take my jeweliery! I thought that I knew the world, Puck; but I suppose after all that I don't.'

And with that soliloquy he lighted his cigarette, and went down-stairs to his brougham.

CHAPTER XXII.

PAR-CI; PAR-LA.

On the morrow he went out alone, and did not permit me to accompany him.

Hence I knew nothing of how the fates of Bronze and the child Gladys fared in the hands of a man whom the town called a gamester and a libertine.

Ascot followed almost immediately on the night in which I had found her with her dying blue-bells; and we were the guests of its prettiest *maisonette*, all through those gay pleasant sunny days of early June. I often thought of poor Bronze as I watched that brilliant scene from the box of Lady Otho Beaujolais, in which Beltran occupied his accustomed place, ignoring or defying, with his natural indifferent recklessness, the furies that he thus awakened in Avice Dare, whose box, though he had given five and twenty guineas for it himself, he almost entirely neglected.

She took her vengeance in a curiously characteristic manner. She went shares with the most unlucky and reckless plunger that she knew in all his maddest ventures, and as he (the merest lad) left off a loser by about five thousand, she involved her friend into the payment of one half of that amount; Beltran of course being obliged to

disregard the poor boy's courteous protests that 'ladies' losses never counted.'

Altogether that Ascot cost him very heavily, and the social gaiety at the *maisonette*, where the champagne-cup seemed to flow in perennity under the lime-trees, and cards to come out of their own accord at evening on the laurustinus terrace, it seemed no marvel if he had altogether forgot his promise to serve a friendless child.

I remarked this to Fanfreluche, who was of course at Ascot with her mistress, and was made much of by her old masters, the First Life.

'My dear,' returned that sapient moralist, 'a gentleman may forget his appointments, his love vows, and his political pledges; he may forget the nonsense he talked, the dances he engaged for, the women that worried him, the electors that bullied him, the wife that married him, and he may be a gentleman still; but there are two things he must never forget, for no gentleman ever does,—and they are, to pay a debt that is a debt of honour, and to keep a promise to a creature that can't force him to keep it. Now, Beltran is a gentleman,—core through.'

By this I suppose that she thought that the case of Gladys and Bronze was safe with him.

We often judge very differently from what you human beings do.

I was once taken into a night-club, where some of the highest play on the town is to be had; where the men who lounge outside its doorway, on a hot night in the season, are the maddest plungers of their time; and where those quiet soft-toned patrician voices name the biggest *coups* of their generation.

'Pick out the best fellow amongst us, little one,' said my patron of the night, who was Clyde Paulette, of the S. F. Guards.

All the men were, as it chanced, almost entire strangers to me; of none of them did I know the character beforehand; but I studied them all one after another, comprehending what was asked of me.

At last I selected one—I cannot tell why—by that peculiar instinct which leads us instantly to a correct diagnosis; and I was greeted by loud shouts of laughter from all present, including the man I signalised.

It seemed that he was known as 'Ruthless Rhy,' from his duels, his intrigues, his fatality to married women, and many other wicked sports and pastimes; was indeed looked upon as the very worst lot, in a set as wild as it was thoroughbred.

But though they made such mockery of me for my choice, I adhered to it, and would not alter.

Well—two years later on, this man Vaughan Rhysworth was martyred in China, when he was on his travels; killed by the most lingering and hideous of deaths. He might have saved himself—might have been living now—if he only would have told one lie. He would not; and he perished. Then men in England, hearing of that death, began to tell to one another many buried things of this lost life; and many who had owed him much were full of shame at their long silence, and spoke out their great debts to him; and the world thrilled strangely at this grand and simple heroism in one who had so long been calumniated and half shunned in its midst. And so it came to pass that they found at length how wisely I had made my choice, and how blindly they had mocked it, in that late summer night in the billiard room when steadfast in my selection I had trusted Ruthless Rhy.

But I wander too far a-field again; if I stray over all my recollections I shall have you as impatient of me as was Gil Blas of the archbishop's sermon.

Our Ascot week was a very pleasant one—bar its losses in money. These were not limited to the losses on the turf; they were increased by those at the picquet and écarté tables that stood out after dinner on the laurustinus terrace, which overlooked the close-shaven lime-shaded lawn; with the cosiest of arm-chairs beside them, and the mellowest of lamps burning near them.

The play was higher and more continual than common in consequence of the presence of the Prince de Ferras, one of Beltran's guests; a handsome and witty person, who was the most inveterate and the most fortunate card-player it has ever been my fortune to know. Beltran rather fancied himself at écarté, and with justice; for there were few better players than he in his set. But either the Prince was in reality far his superior, or else the run of the cards was too strong for science to change them, for it is certain

that in the five Ascot days M. de Ferras won from his host some very enormous stakes. He was a very rich man too, which made it more provoking.

'The French were very stupid when they fixed Play in the masculine gender,' grinned Fanfreluche, sore of heart for her hero. 'How can it be anything but a woman? see how it smiles on the fullest purse.'

Avice Dare, however, was not like hazard; she did not smile on the courtly de Ferras, who for his part treated her with a cool and even ceremonious manner, which seemed to argue a profound distaste for her.

I remarked this to Fanfreluche; who tilted her ears over her nose with her accustomed gesture of satiric scorn.

'My dear! how can one tell! I saw a man once, the whole London season through, so insolently rude to a married woman, that everybody wondered she did not strike him off her visiting-list. Well, when August came, he eloped with her in his yacht to South America. O, you can never tell. Men in love are often most intensely disagreeable. They are so mad with themselves for being such fools that they take it out in hard hitting all round.

'But M. de Ferras,'—I began in a maze

'O, pooh, my dear!' cried Fanfreluche. 'He has robbed his host at cards, and abused his host behind his back: to fulfil the whole duty of a nineteenth century guest it only remains for him to betray his host in love!'

'You think very ill of men?' I muttered; I was indeed, slightly weary of her sceptical supercilious treatment of all things; your pseudo-philosopher, who will always think he has plumbed the ocean with his silver-topped cane, is a great bore sometimes.

'I think very well of men,' returned Fanfreluche. 'You are mistaken, my dear. There are only two things that they never are honest about—and that is their sport and their women. When they get talking of their rocketers, or their runs, their pigeon-score, or their *bonnes fortunes*, they always lie—quite unconsciously. And if they miss their bird or their woman, isn't it always because the sun was in their eyes as they fired, or because she wasn't half good looking enough to try after?—bless your heart, I know them!'

'If you do you are not complimentary to them,' I grumbled,

'Can't help that, my dear,' returned Fanfreluche. 'Gracious! whatever is there that stands the test of knowing it well? I have heard Beltran say, that you find out what an awful humbug the Staubach is when you go up to the top and see you can straddle across it. Well, the Staubach is just like everything in this life. Keep your distance, and how well the creature looks!—all veiled in its spray, and all bright with its prismatic colours, so deep, and so vast, and so very impressive. But just go up to the top, scale the crags of its character, and measure the height of its aspirations, and fathom the torrent of its passions, and sift how much is the foam of speech, and how little is the well-spring of thought. Well, my dear, it is a very uncommon creature if it don't turn out just like the Staubach.'

I have since seen the Staubach myself, and don't consider it any finer than the Kinder Scout* of my birthplace; at that time I was mute; I was thinking that there were some waters, deep, cool and silent, hidden from human sight, that no man ever fathomed, and that there were such characters likewise.

'Yes, there are,' said Fanfreluche, divining in her curious fashion my unuttered reflection. 'And there are men like them. And I will tell you what there is too; there is a torrent that flings airiest foam-bells on the wind, and sparkles with gayest colours in the light, and seems to dance and sing all its mirthful hours through, as lightly and as emptily as though it were but a sheet of froth; and yet beneath, all the while, it is so dark, so deep, so sad, so still, and it only flashes with colour and foam, so that none may probe its depths, and none stir its dead that it hides.

'But, goodness me, I shall be too late to dine at Maidenhead!' she cried, interrupting herself, as though ashamed of her momentary earnestness. 'You know the Brigades have taught them simplicity there, and the dinners are very good; I don't care for simplicity as a rule, it's the biggest bore and impostor that ever existed, and with women always means limp muslin, weak tea, and a thatched cottage

* Puck means a fall of water in the wild country about the Kinder Scout, the highest summit in the hills of the Peak range. Allowance must be made for his patriotic prejudices.—Ed.

full of rats and earwigs. But when simplicity has the Guards for godfathers, and takes the form of ducks and green peas, or a perfect haunch of venison, I do like her. She's worth all the foreign cooks in the universe.'

And off she went to enjoy it, perched atop of one of the drags of the Household.

Ascot fell very late that year; and as I overheard that we were shortly to go yachting, and afterwards to the German gambling-places, I trembled for the fate of Gladys Gerant and Bronze, notwithstanding the assurances of my little Mentor.

The day she spoke thus was our last day under the lindens and acacias of this pleasant little cottage—a cottage with a billiard-table and a croquet-ground, a conservatory, half-a-dozen men-servants, nine o'clock dinners, and a drawing-room in blue velvet.

There are few things more pleasant, I am inclined to believe, than the mixture of Town and Country, judiciously managed. You like the purling murmurs of a brook all the better, if beside you a delicate Burgundy also murmurs out of its jug. You find the odours of the sweet briar and the roses all the sweeter, if they be crossed by the spice-like perfume of your favourite cigarettes.

The song of the nightingales comes more purely and clearly than ever as you sit by the open windows, pushing the wine and the olives around. The hay never smells so fragrantly as when the wind tosses it to you where the five-o'clock tea is passing from hand to hand, under the golden-starred pyramids of the blossoming lime-trees.

And when the great white moon goes sailing through the dark clouds above the woods, you think how lovely the night is—as lovely as nights used to be in your boyhood—when leaning over the balcony you are fanned by a jewelled hand; and lightly chiming across your thoughts come breaks of song, murmurs of laughter, fragments of the world's idlest talk, from those bright chambers within, that you see through the lace of the curtains, and the screen of camellias and myrtles, as you look away from this starry still night, and this fan that stirs like the wing of a bird.

O yes, it is well to talk of the mountains and forests in solitude. Take your tent if you will and live roughly, aloft on some barren plateau; cook your snared bird in a

bed of ashes, and lie down to sleep on your pile of heather, and stare at the stars through the rent in your canvas, and stalk out alone in the mists of the dawn. That is very well; and it is very well you should think so, if you cannot afford any other; and it is simple, and solemn, and grand, and all that. But for pure amusement, my friend—combine the Town and the Country.

A certain friend of mine went not long ago to pass his *villeggiatura* in one of the fairest spots in all Europe. There is a poetic calm about the place that is beautiful exceedingly; great snow-clad mountains enclose it; deep darkling lakes sleep in its shadowy woods; wild pine-woods tower against skies of deepest blue; boats glide all through the day dream-like upon its waters; there is the sound of falling torrents everywhere, and now and then the chime of bells.

He spent seven weeks there. When he lounged into Arthur's again, another man asked him how he had enjoyed his time in that happy valley of the Oberland.

'Well,' he made answer slowly, with a big cigar in his mouth, 'we made the time out pretty tolerably. We used to breakfast late; and we'd get to whist about three in the afternoon, and we'd play on till about two next morning—bar dining, of course. We did that every day. It wasn't half bad fun. Never had such a steady innings in all my life; and we'd first-class players. I don't know that I ever saw better: not even here, nor at the Arlington.'

Now this man, whatever you may think, is neither of an unpoetic temperament, nor of an inartistic mind; he has, on the contrary, a great deal of feeling and of perception in him; and for athletic powers, whether in climbing, boating, or walking, he has few rivals. It was not therefore that he was a Peter Bell, to whom every primrose was but a stupid weed; it was only that he wanted his town in his country, and took it—in the form of a pack of cards.

I think that is the reason why, of all your human pastimes, yachting is the most charming to you.

You have the freedom of the seas, the freshness of the winds; the width of the waters is round you, and above flashes the silver-winged gull; life and its worries lie behind you with that low white shore that has died out of sight; all debts and all difficulties have been severed with the rope

that moored your row-boat to the pier-head. You are away, and are afloat, and are free.

And yet all the luxurious pleasantness of the world you have left, are still with you. On the cushioned bench there lies the newest novel, just cut. In the big goblet the lumps of ice float on the golden wine. Screwed upon your deck your whist-table shows its green, tranquil, familiar face. The silky nectarines and the purple grapes lie lazily together on your plate. In the pretty mirrored cabin a choice little dinner will wait you, when the sun goes down; and, if you be one not happy without this additional toy, there can be also beside you some feminine form clad in the richest and coyest of dresses, that with gold buttons and azure satin and snowy silk so amusingly copies your own sailor's attire. You can strike right across an ocean, and yet can carry the town with you.

Here is the real charm of yachting that makes it the prince of all your pastimes.

To that pastime we went from Ascot; to the beautiful graceful, gleaming schooner Bonniebelle, that called my master master also, where she lay on the smooth gray narrow ribbon of the Solent water.

It was such a picturesque existence, I am ashamed to say I forgot everything else in it. Lady Otho was queen on board the Bonniebelle—charming Lady Otho, with her pretty haughty head, and her gracious imperial ways, and her soft patrician languor that was sweet as the south wind, after the brusque tyrannies of the *cocottes*.

It was so pleasant there.

Resting all through the night, with the lamps of the opposing shores glistening through the gloom like glowworms through a twilight. Gliding all through the day, with laughter and music and song, and the scent of cigarettes and the sound of gay careless voices, just crossed by the sailors' shouts and the splash of the severed waters. Staying now and again at nooks in the little Island, where some pretty house was bowered in a nest of red tangled creepers, and a green shadowy lawn sloped down to be lapped by the waves; and quaint balconies, all leaf-covered, leaned over the white foam-crests. Waiting far into the midnight, while the waltz tunes rang over the beach, and the white dresses here and there flashed through the aisles of syringa

and myrtle; and the lights shone out through dark festoons of foliage and thickets of tall fuschia; and the glad good-nights were called, gaily from voice to voice; and the cigars were lit, and the boat was pushed off, and the waters rippled under the oars, and the harvest-moon arose, broad and bright, above the silvered sea. Ah, how pleasant the life was!—the old sweet life that is dead!

In it I could discern no sign that my master had remembered the child Gladys. Only once did I fancy that he had spoken of her.

The Bonniebelle had run far down Channel; it was a very sultry afternoon; the sky was cloudless, and the sails hung motionless in the hot dry air. Lady Otho reclined under her awning, lovely beyond compare with a gorgeous feather fan in her hand.

Beltran had been talking more seriously to her than usual; and those two, whose attachment was of the serenest and the most passionate sort, now seemed for the moment almost to have approached—a quarrel.

'*You* turning knight-errant, Vere!' I heard her say, as I drew near to listen; and there was a smile on her lips new there, and not sweet. '*Ah, je ne crois pas les miracles excepté en foi!*'

'Believe or not, as you like,' answered Beltran, as he rose from his seat and lighted a cigarette.

'Some women are awfully good to us, Ned,' he muttered a few minutes later to Lord Guilliadene. 'But how bitter bad the best of them are to their own sex!'

'Awfully bad,' assented the handsome Earl, brewing himself a pick-me-up. 'What's amiss with Alice Beaujolais? You've ruffled her somehow, haven't you?'

"Not I, said Beltran. 'It's the weather.'

But I do not think it was the weather, oppressive though the heat and the calm might be. I think he had been speaking to her of the story of Gladys, and seeking to interest her in it—vainly.

I suppose I shall be considered very heterodox if I write a thing that I really believe; but I do believe it; and it is this—that men are much softer at heart than women.

O, I know men can be hard enough; they can swear savagely on occasions; they can hit mercilessly when they are minded; they can be like steel or granite to a woman

whom they have ceased to care about; I know that. But for all that they are never hard with the chill, contented, egotistic, lifelong brutality of women. *Après moi, le déluge!*—that is a woman all over. If the Pompadour did not say it, she ought to have done.

Lucretius has said how charming it is to stand under a shelter in a storm, and see another hurrying through its rain and wind; but a woman would refine that sort of cruelty, and would not be quite content unless she had an umbrella beside her that she refused to lend.

I get very out of patience when I hear of the tenderness of women; they are only tender just for themselves and their belongings—as tigresses and bears are. They have no notion of any impersonal sympathy. Men you can move by a thousand things—their imaginations, their affections, their chivalries, their follies, their intelligence, their perception,—what you will. But a woman can only be moved by just one thing alone—her own private interests.

Women always put me in mind of that bird of yours, the cuckoo.

Your poetry and your platitudes have all combined to attach a most sentimental value to cuckoos and women. All sorts of pretty phantasies surround them both; the spring-tide of the year, the breath of early flowers, the verse of old dead poets, the scent of sweet summer rains, the light of bright dewy dawns—all these things you have mingled with the thought of the cuckoo, till its first call through the woods in April brings all these memories with it. Just so in like manner have you entangled your poetic ideals, your dreams of peace and purity, all divinities of patience and of pity, all sweet saintly sacrifice and sorrow, with your ideas of women.

Well—cuckoos and women, believe me, are very much like each other, and not at all like your phantasy:—to get a well-feathered nest without the trouble of making it, and to keep easily in it themselves, no matter who may turn out in the cold, is both cuckoo and woman all over; and while you quote Herrick and Wordsworth about them as you walk in the dewy green wood, they are busy slaying the poor lonely fledglings, that their own young may lie snug and warm.

Allons! I shall be told, I suppose, that it is very easy (and

therefore ignoble) to satirize woman. It *is* easy, no doubt—just as Pasquinades were easy in the corruption of Borgian Rome; just as epigrams were easy in the vileness of Bourbonic France. Had Rome been virtuous or France pure, Pasquin's pillar would have been blank, and Figaro's mouth been silent.

After the yachting there came the playing places in Germany; and after those there came the shooting: the latter at a variety of houses, in a variety of counties. Our servant, who was, as I have said, a notable exception to his class, and had taken me greatly into his affections, bore me about through all these manifold changes; and though his master and mine laughed at him for cumbering himself with me, Beltran never offered any serious opposition to my presence wherever he went.

It seemed to me the hardest work that ever men set themselves, that inveterate 'gunning' from sunrise to sunset: that incessant unremitting assiduity with which they devoted themselves to the slaughter of birds without any pause or breathing space, save in that one hour when the hot luncheon smoked under the nut-coppice, and the champagne-cup was drunk where the great curling ferns shielded the mouse and the wren.

But the share that I had in it was pleasant enough. Sometimes we were at great country-houses, filled with fashionable gatherings; sometimes we were at those grand ducal mansions that stand amidst the gorse and bracken of the midland shires; sometimes we were at his own place, a gray rambling old baronial pile, set in the heart of the green meadows, and the beechen woods, and the drowsy hawthorn lanes, of Bucks.

There were always women, of course; dainty dames and demoiselles of the world of fashion. Alice Beaujolais being always invited with the same circle of guests as Beltran, with that curious tacit recognition and condonation of such a *liaison* which people always accord while the woman is 'in society,' and which contrasts so comically with their virtuous ostracism of her if she once be fool enough to blunder into an open scandal and the columns of the newspapers.

'My dear, she goes everywhere; she attends the Drawing-rooms, you know; and her own people visit her It

would be ridiculous for us to object.'—I have heard titled women say this hundreds of times of great ladies of their own order, whom they knew to be guilty of the vilest of intrigues and the foulest of sensualities, and whose 'connections' were as notorious to their own set as though they had been pilloried in a market-place. And they never did object accordingly, but asked each aristocratic sinner, with her favourite 'friend' of the moment, in the very kindest and most charitable manner possible.

If a silly idiot mismanaged her matters and created scandal by getting into the divorce court, or by irritating a long-suffering society with some folly that it is quite impossible for society to be blind to, of course it was a different thing. They 'objected' then with all imaginable severity, and combined their forces to drive forth the foolish one from the sacred precincts of an outraged community.

Lady Otho, therefore, being a woman of an exquisite tact, and taking care to be always *au mieux* with her husband (a sensible creature likewise, who thought that in the matter of condonation it was always best to 'give and take'), went to all the houses that Beltran went to, and carried on her 'platonics' with him with the most admirable ease. She deigned to take much notice of myself; and though she declined to accept me when offered to her, petted me habitually very much, as she usually did the youngest and sauciest addition to her 'pretty pages,' from the cornet-list of the Brigades.

I never knew quite whether I liked her—how can you with those women of the world? She was kind and insincere; she was gentle and she was cruel; she was generous and ungenerous; she was true as steel, and she was false as Judas—what would you?—she was a woman of the world, with several sweet natural impulses, and all a coquette's diplomacies.

She tended me with the greatest solicitude one day that autumn, when I had run a thorn into my foot: and the very next day, when I was well again, she laughed to see me worried on the lawn by a bull-terrier. If you have not met a woman like that, I wonder where you have lived.

However, as a rule I enjoyed myself amongst those fair patricians in the various houses we visited. I played with their wools and floss silks; tore their yellow-papered novels,

and stept on their velvet or silken skirts at my fancy, in the mornings; strolled after them in the conservatories and rose gardens; was curled on their folded plaids when they graced the pheasant or grouse drives with their presence; and learned to care for the bang of the breach-loaders, and the risk of a shot, as little as they cared when a brave old cock bird staggered dead through the smoke, and they watched how the wagers they had laid in gloves went.

Then when luncheon came on the sturdy gray pony's back, and they dispossessed me of their plaids to stretch themselves thereon, they would toss me *foie gras*, and truffles, and biscuits; while nonsense, 'delicious thing, like the bubble from a spring,' and laughter, and stories, and half-gay, half-sad fragments of vague sentiment, floated with the smoke of the cigarettes, and the scent of the delicate burgandies, amongst the yellow furze and the wet mosses, and the big dock leaves of the bank, up to the branches of the nut-tree hedge, where amongst the half-reddened foliage the linnet would be singing her latest, and the robin his earliest, song.

It was pleasant, very pleasant, and in these bright, careless, sport-filled days of autumn, there seemed no time in which to remember Bronze and Gladys. I forgot:—and I supposed that he forgot also.

When I met Fanfreluche again, she scoffed at me severely for this. She came to stay with her mistress at that old place of Beltran's in the beechwoods of Bucks. He was seldom there except in the shooting season; it appeared that his fortune was too impoverished for him to be able to sustain the enormous expenses which a nobleman's open house and great establishment involve.

When he went down to the place it was in a half-bohemian, half-bivouac fashion, that yet was perhaps pleasanter than any other, in the old dim, picturesque, historic house, with its oak-panelled rooms, and its stained windows, and its shady grass terraces with their dark cedars. For though he called it roughing it, the roughness was only of the most artistic sort; with a perfect cook, and perfect wines, and perfect cigars; with wondrous old gold plate, and fabulous antiques, and paintings, and china, all round; and a grand piano in the Elizabethan drawing-room, and the clash of billiard-balls under the painted arches of the

Chapel entrance, and whist-tables in the little garden room, that looked through oriel windows on to the terraces and the cedars.

Here Lady Otho came not; and the society somewhat scandalised the county.

I suppose he thought that the *demi-monde* best suited that indolent, irregular, half-bohemian existence; and that when his guests and he came trooping in through the twilight, from the golden-woods, and the broad bistre fallows, into that strange old place, it was easier to be able to lounge into dinner in their velvet shooting dress; it was easier to be able to talk whatever impudent mischief came uppermost; it was easier to be able to brush a kiss from a cheek so coolly, and with as little pardon asked, as when brushing the bloom off a peach. It was easier certainly; and they were wont to declare that the ultimate practice of both *mondes* was the same, it was their theories only that differed. And when you come in tired from a long day's shooting, and indisposed for more exertion than to drink your wine and to light your cigar, it is easier to have to do with women who have no theories. For, at any rate, the theorists expect you to put on your dress coat, and to keep awake after dinner.

By the way, permit me, in parenthesis, to say that one of the chief causes of that preference for the *demi-monde* which you daily and hourly discover more and more, is the indulgence it shows to idleness. Because your lives are so intense now, and always at high pressure,—for that very reason are you more indolent also in little things. It bores you to dress; it bores you to talk; it bores you to be polite. Sir Charles Grandison might find ecstasy in elaborating a bow, a wig, or a speech; you like to give a little nod, cut your hair very short, and make 'awfully' do duty for all your adjectives.

'*Autres temps, autres mœurs.*' You are a very odd mixture. You will go to the ends of the earth on the scent of big game; but you shirk all social exertion with a cynical laziness. You will come from Damascus at a stretch without sleeping, and think nothing of it; but you find it a wretched thing to have to exert yourself to be courteous in a drawing-room.

Therefore the *demi-monde* suits you with a curious fitness,

and suits you more and more every year. I am afraid it is not very good for you. I don't mean for your morals; I don't care the least about them, I am a dog of the world; I mean for your manners. It makes you slangy, inert, rude, lazy. And yet, what perfect gentlemen you can be still, and what grace there is in your careless weary ease, when you choose to be courteous; and you always *do* choose, that I must say for you, when you find a woman who is really worth the trouble.

Fanfreluche, who came thither with Avice Dare, took me to task, as I say, for my supposition that Beltran had forgotten his promise. She insisted that he had not done so, however appearances might betoken.

'He hasn't forgotten,' she assured me again and again, and with much force, one Sunday afternoon, when there was no gunning, and everybody was out on the terrace in the warm golden October afternoon, reading novels, playing *écarté*, drinking seltzers, chanting glees, sauntering under the great old cedars, while the crimsoned woods stretched away in the sunlight, and the creepers glowed scarlet where they trailed over the stone balustrade.

'Gentlemen don't forget—not that sort of thing, I mean. Now, you look there at Neil Strathalan—there—he's pouring out the claret-cup for Laura. Beastly stuff, that those tomfools of the butler's pantry poke cucumber, and lemon, and spice, and brandy, and every abomination into! As though wine weren't bad enough by itself.'

I looked at Neil Strathalan as she spoke; he was one of the men staying with us; an ex-guardsman; a duke's son; a handsome, worn, reckless, indolent-looking man of the world, of whom I had seldom heard anything good.

'I know what a bad fellow everybody thinks my Lord Neil. And he does go awfully fast, that I grant. Plunges; turns night into day; makes love to no end of married women; does everything that he ought not to do. Well, I'll tell you a thing I know about Neil. It happened a long time ago, when I belonged to the Brigades. There was a man alive at the time called Maurice Drysdale; he was a great friend of Neil's, and they were always together. Poor Maurice was thoroughbred all over, but he was fearfully poor; he went the pace like all of them, and he hadn't stay in him for it; and he broke down—utterly—fortune, and

body, and mind. He got abroad to avoid arrest, and he died abroad at a little fishing town in Norway.

'Neil Strathalan was yachting at that time in the northern waters, and he just reached in time to see the last of one of the handsomest, bravest, truest gentlemen that ever was killed by plunging. I was with him, and I saw Maurice too lying in that little, pent, dark, close chamber, with its scent of fish, and of tar, and of salt water, and with the endless sound of the sea coming in through the square hole in the wall, which was all that served him as casement.

'I can see him now, with his frank fair face, and his bright chestnut curls, and his great massive limbs that had, so little a while before, owned all the strength of giants, and now were stretched there powerless as a child's, and with the life ebbing out of them as the tide ebbed off the shore. His eyes were growing very dim, but he knew Neil.

'He looked up at him with his old sweet smile, and found force to grasp his hand. "You'll take care of Ailie," he murmured. "Poor little Ailie! She'll be safe with you, Neil? You'll look after her, won't you? her and the child?"

'Neil clenched his hand in both his own: "By God, I will!" and as he said it the last wave of the tide rolled off the shore, and the last breath died on Maurice Drysdale's lips. And Neil—ah! do you know what a man's grief is to see?

'Ailie Gratton was a mere girl—eighteen years I think at most—and she had loved Maurice with all a woman's passion, and much more than most women's fealty. He had met her in a summer-tour about the Irish lakes; it had been the old story, the Faust story that the world loves to condemn, whilst it leaves unarraigned the Messalinas of its palaces. She was far lovelier, truer, and more tender than most Gretchens are. Dying there, his last thought had been of Ailie—poor little Ailie—as defenceless, as lonely, and almost as innocent as any one of the heaths on her native mountains. For he had kept her in perfect seclusion, and had never let a gross word or a coarse glance light near her. Yet he had died alone—well, because such men will; they drag themselves out to solitude like stricken stags.

'Do you think Neil forgot his promise or not? Perhaps

you will confess that I know something more of men than you do when I tell you that no sister was ever dealt with more loyally, tenderly, and reverently than is his dead friend's darling dealt with by Neil Strathalan. Ailie lives in utter solitude, giving herself up to the care of her son, and to the memory of her lost and unforgotten love. All want, all hardship, all anxiety are spared her; and she, absorbed in one remembrance, hardly heeds, scarcely knows all that she and her child owe to Neil. As for words of shame or passion, he would no more breathe them to her than he would lift his hand to slay her.

'Once when his visits to her got bruited about (for all things are seen and told in this day!), the world, which is always so vile of thought that it deems all men must be vile of deed also, said that this man was worse even than it had called him; that ere his comrade was cold in his grave he sought the dead man's mistress as his own. Neil smiled when he heard that they said this. He knew—I know—that sacred to him as the name of his mother, were the trust of his friend and his promise.'

I said nothing; I felt that she spoke truth; although of Neil Strathalan I saw nothing save an evil, careless, hard, good-looking man, whose speech was very caustic, and whose life was very lazy, and whose ways and works were, as the world said, all of wickedness.

Fanfreluche, ashamed again of having suffered herself to feel—unwise shame, that she had caught up from her friends of the Clubs and the Row—trotted off, shaking her bells, to beg for bonbons from Beltran. Whether she was right about his memory of the child Gladys I knew not; and events soon took place which thrust all speculations on it out of my head.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VENDETTA.

THE Coronet was of course far too fashionable a theatre to be open during the months when the town was a desert,

Hapless amateurs would indeed now and again disport themselves upon its stage, and some crazed creature would perchance ruin himself with a 'Shakespearian revival,' or an 'Opera for the Million,' in those dusty desolate months when the clubs were tenantless and the park was a prairie. But its own people knew it no more.

Mrs. Delamere went to the Baths, sweeping from Spa to Homburg, and from Homburg to Baden, at her fancy, changing her dress three times a-day, wearing the costliest of Worth's costumes, throwing the Astolat gold away at the tables, and holding her pretty classic head as proudly as any queen regnant or empress amongst them all. And so did likewise such of her wise sisterhood, as, nominally dancing at the Coronet, actually spent in three months the fortune of any young baronet, or coronet of the brigades, who thought it manly and fashionable to have their brazen chignons beside him in his phaeton, and to pay for their ball at Willis's Rooms or their big dinner at Richmond.

As for the luckless ones who either had not a pretty face to attract the stalls, or else were foolish enough to cling to some poor shred of self-respect and honesty, they of course went in the dead season to east-end theatres and music halls, or to a toilsome tour about the provinces; and spent their sultry summer amongst the grit and dust of stifling cities, paying thus in murk and misery, and continual toil, for their ignorance in not perceiving that the only horn of plenty is held fast in the hands of vice.

With the early days of November the glories of the Coronet revived, and were to revive with more extravagance than usual this season; with a new burlesque, gorgeous in the extreme, and of enormous cost, in which the darling of the public was to delight it with even less drapery and more jigs than ever.

It was much talked of during the shooting-time, and as no pains or expense had been spared in the preparation of it, so great results were expected from its production.

Denzil had often urged my master to sever his connection with the theatre, but Beltran had never been induced to do so.

'Amateur management is worse than plunging,' Denzil had said one night on the grass terrace in the shooting season. 'Farquhar of the old Royal Buskin makes his

fortune by a theatre, and why? Because he is a clever man of business, who supplies the town with amusement as a mere matter of commerce, just as a publican does beer. He has been at it all his days, is not troubled with scruples, and is as hard as nails to boot. He would never allow a pretty pale piece of inanity to murder a fine bit of "leading business," as I have known you to do, because the piece of inanity was young and poor, and wept bitterly, and prayed of you to treat her like a star. And he would, on the contrary, take his twenty or thirty sovereigns a-week from any dainty dame of casino celebrity, whose "friends" would pay to get her on to the boards, whose dresses would be ninety guineas each, and all stiff with golden brocade, and whose admirers would fill the stalls and muster strong and often in the private boxes. Now, as for you—you bade Wynch keep on that wretched woman Berthald because the woman was old and was ugly, and could ill find engagements; you insisted on little Lacy being retained because she was only seventeen and had not a shilling in the world, when you knew she broke down in the mere letter with every fifth word she spoke; you allowed that wild, German, Waldenvorst, to rant in Kotzebue and Shakespeare, because you found him a scholar, and a poet, and a beggar, and God knows what all besides; you never give yourself the trouble of having the accounts audited by any public accountant; and you never give yourself the chance of making money by the only paying places in the house, because you are always lending stalls to any man that wants them, and always offering the boxes to every pretty creature you meet. Night after night I have seen every private box filled with women of our set, to whom you had given them, and who only came there to flirt, and to chatter, and to yawn a little, and to have cups of tea sent them in from your room.'

Beltran smiled.

'Go on, pray: the recollection of the tea seems to excite you rather. As far as I can remember, the wine that the Press drinks is the bigger item.'

'And I have seen,' pursued Denzil, regardless of the interruption, 'the very best actresses you ever had snubbed out of the theatre by that woman yonder. I have known the poor girls actually surrender their engagements rather

than endure the insolence of her abominable injuries. When she is called at rehearsal, she is always absent. Inquire, and you find she is 'bored,' and gone to her brougham, and so are Dora Delany and Vic Villiers, just because you give them high wages to oblige Annesley and Fred Orford, though neither of the girls has a grain of talent, or sense, or decency even; and both have their 'brougham,' and can snap their fingers at fines. Then, when the first night comes, you wonder they are not letter-perfect, and that the prompter's is almost the only voice heard.'

'You are hard to please, Derry,' said Beltran with a smile. 'I am wrong when I take penniless virtue, and wrong when I take independent vice! Pray go on; it is delightful to hear you. In Gertrude d'Eyncourt's time you weren't so severe on that poor old Roi d'Yvetot—the stage.'

'Like most Rois d'Yvetot, it pays its ministers with a senile laugh, and starves its public while it crams its courtesans.'

'Don't be so fearfully epigrammatic. An epigram is a truffle of truth, dished up in a soufflée of superciliousness. Your antagonism to the poor theatre—'

'I have no antagonism to any theatre. I have a very bitter antagonism to women who order their lover to take one, as they bid him buy them a £5,000 diamond locket, careless how he may pay for their toy with his ruin; women who, without one shred of talent, grace, or learning, seek it simply as the arena on which to show their forms, and display their diamonds, dress at their rivals, and put themselves up for sale. It is as utterly disastrous for a gentleman to become an *impresario* as it is for him to become a builder. Where the adept makes a fortune, the amateur only rushes to ruin. A theatre is a most ruinous toy for any man of your temper and tastes. Is the game worth the millions of candles you burn at both ends for it? For the life of me, I can't see what you get in return for your money? Only the obligation to give dinners and suppers to actresses whose genius lies in their legs or their hair, and comedians whose facetiæ are even staler and more intolerable over the claret-jug than before the floats; only the necessity to mingle in a society inferior to your own,

composed of people who, whilst they supplicate you with unblushing impudence for your invitations, curse you behind your back, because you are what they call a swell! People who submit to your contempt for the sake of your champagnes, and who tout you for Richmond or Greenwich dinners, while they hate you like poison for the mere tone of your voice, the mere cut of your coats, the mere cost of the flower in your buttonhole!'

'You're awfully good fun, Derry, when one does get a rise out of you. Perhaps I shall please even you with an actress one day—*qui vivra verra.* There's the dinner-bell. The cook sent me word that he's invented a new style of jumping mushrooms in wine, which he thinks we shall pronounce very great in it's way. Come along.'

In this wise was Denzil's advice always disregarded, and we went to town for the first night of this splendid piece; many of Beltran's own set—men and women both—did likewise, although it was early winter, and fashionable London was still desolate. It was to be produced on a Saturday night, and he went up in the afternoon of that day, having asked some score of critics and *litterati* to a dinner on the morrow at the Leviathan—the one hotel in London where the clarets are what they call themselves, and the innumerable *nuances* of choice fish are studied, and the artichoke and the tomato are comprehended to be as equal in import, and as different, as a fugue of Bach and an overture of Rossini.

Laura Pearl had been in London some two weeks or so, rehearsing; and the extravaganza was entirely to her glory; for notwithstanding its magnificence, its cost, and its reputed worth, as a thing actually of *esprit*, it was well understood that its chief attraction for the town would lie in the fact of its being written chiefly to exhibit a soulless, shameless, mindless woman, who had a fairer face and a more notorious infamy than any other; or at least had the good fortune to have them more talked about.

'If there were a Garrick on the stage, the stalls would vote him bad form, yawn, and go away to their carriages or their clubs. But they will flock night after night to see Pearl, half-dressed, jump about in a breakdown,' said Fanfreluche. 'The fascination Pearls, or anything at all treating of them, possess for society is a very odd feature

of said society.* It is a fact—there is no disputing it—that the public are as eager to see the worst woman of her year as they would be to see the greatest hero that ever lived. A theatre will fill from pit to roof, if only a cruel courtesan will show on its boards. A girl's photograph will sell like wildfire if she be only known to be absolutely infamous. People in the park gaze after Laura Pearl or Lillian Lee with as curious a wonder and reverence as if they gazed after a Jeanne d'Arc or a Vivia Perpetua. Honourable women name them openly, and study their dress, and put their pictures in their albums. They have their opera-box and their pew at church; they are copied in their coiffures, and they are asked for their patronage to charities. It is awfully odd, this deification of degradation! Where will it end, I wonder? Ah, where will it, indeed? Well, I suppose it will end in their apotheosis. They have got to the Lawn; they will get to Hurlingham: and then I suppose there won't be a reasonable doubt but what they'll get also to heaven!'

Which was profane of Fanfreluche, but pardonable; for if she placed heaven latest and highest in her estimate of the triad, it is certainly more than most ladies seem to do.

I contrived to slip unseen down to the Coronet on this Saturday night. We arrived there towards the end of a witty, graceful old comedy, which formed the *lever du rideau*. Beltran went almost at once to the box of Alice Beaujolais, and thence to other people he knew in the house. I stayed behind.

The comedy soon came to an end. Maude Delamere swept off in a superb dress, and an injured frame of mind; martyred indeed she might well feel, as the house had been only one third full until her last act; and she was well worth seeing in her comedies, despite the *Midas* sneers at her.

It was half-past nine—the time for the burlesque.

'Where on earth is Laura?' said Beltran, coming in from the front of the house, where he had been conversing with some friends.

'It's a quarter past her time,' said Denzil, who was

* This was in the printer's hands before the *Formosa* audiences gave fresh evidence of the accuracy of Mlle. Fanfreluche's observations.—Ed.

flirting a little with Mrs. Delamere as he put her carriage-cloak round her.

Beltran went across and rapped on the panels of the Pearl's dressing-room door; silence following, he pushed it open. The little chamber was empty.

The music had burst out afresh, and succeeded in amusing the audience. They played through the whole of the *Bronze Horse* overture; when it was ended she had not made her appearance.

Beltran smoked a cigar with apparent indifference, but his eyes grew angry.

The gods of the gallery began to raise an uproar; they stamped, and kicked, and whistled, and screamed snatches of song.

'Time's up!' they holloaed.

''Tis, by Jove!' muttered Denzil. 'Shall I go and look for her, Beltran?'

'Let the call-boy go.'

The call-boy went.

The orchestra—gallant defenders of the stormed breach—burst bravely into a ringing waltz of Offenbach.

But the gods had heard enough of melody, and preferred their own tuneful screechings; they would not hearken to their Orpheus with his flourished baton. They shouted, and hissed, and swore, and kicked, and screamed out snatches of the vilest music-hall comic ballads.

The stalls yawned visibly; the women in the private boxes rose.

Beltran, with his cigar in his teeth, looked pale with anger. But he said nothing; silence was his second nature in any crisis; he abhorred people who 'ruffled ill.'

'Let me go on and sing, sir!' said a little musical, feverish voice at his elbow. 'They cotton to me, you know, my lord; and p'rhaps I'd keep 'em quiet?'

He looked kindly down on Nellie as she approached him. She had been allotted a good part in the coming burlesque, and was radiant in the gauze and gold, the glittering wings, and the starry crown, of a fairy's best Paris costume.

'You're a good child. Well—go.'

She tripped on to the stage at his order, and burst, without preface or trepidation, into a charming little slang-song. It was utter nonsense, but it had gay, airy music

to it; the musicians knew it, and took up its burden at her first bars; the gods welcomed her with rapture and growling intermixed. The song was a success, and a truce, for the moment.

'While they're quiet I'll get Alice away. They may grow noisy,' murmured Beltran.

A second or two later I saw him, through the flies, in a private box where sat, with her party, Lady Otho Beaujolais.

'What an ass!' swore Denzil, regarding him as he placed her Cashmeres round the great lady's shoulders, and led her from the box. 'To give the signal himself to empty his own house!'

'What on earth did you do that for, Vere?' he asked, when Beltran, returning to the scene of warfare, calmly re-lit another cigar.

'Lady Otho hates rows,' he said briefly.

'And you think there'll be one?'

'Must be.'

He leaned his back against one of the upright beams, and waited.

There was a frightful confusion and tumult around him; prompter, scene-painters, old Wynch, the luckless players, all the numberless supers and machinists of a fashionable theatre, were wild with exultation and agitation. Still he said nothing; but his face grew pale, and I did not care to look up at the gleam in his darkening gray eyes.

There was still no appearance of Laura Pearl, nor of any apology from her.

'Surely she must be ill?' hazarded Denzil.

'She'd have sent in that case,' said her lover, his feelings undisturbed by the suggestion.

To commence the piece without her was impossible; the first scene entirely, and almost solely, depended on the absentee.

The gallant little Wood-Elf, a heroine to the core, recommenced her singing with a daring and persistence worthy of the Vieille Garde itself. But her charming could charm no longer; almost all the respectable part of the house had followed when Beltran had led out his peeress; some men in the stalls alone remained. But the crowd in the two upper tiers and the pit were still there;

and their howling and hooting sounded as though demons themselves were unloosed.

The Wood-Elf ran off breathless.

'O, my lord! I'm afear'd—I am indeed—that they'll get chucking something at me!'

'Dress and run off home,' answered Beltran. 'I'll thank you to-morrow, Nellie.'

The girl's eyes flashed and danced, and her young cheeks were in flame beneath their rouge.

'I don't want thanking, sir,' she whispered. 'Might I, please, stay and see it out?'

Ere he could attend to or answer her, the call-boy rushed in, gasping for utterance.

'Well?' said Beltran imperiously.

'If you please, sir,' palpitated the hapless Mercury, who was in mortal terror at the message he brought; 'if you please, my lord, she've a bin out since five, and she han't bin back, my lord. But they ses as how this here was left, and was to be sint when you sint arter her.'

And the boy tremblingly tendered a note.

Beltran, with his face as calm as an alabaster mask, tore open the letter.

Long afterwards I knew that letter ran thus:

'You're a clever fellow, Beltran; but you're a fool all the same. Don't tell a woman again you can get as good as her for breakdowns with whistling for 'em. When you get this I shall be off to Paris with the Prince de Ferras. If you think me worth fighting about—well; he's a deal better shot nor you, I saw that with the rocketers. I hope your new piece will be a hit to-night. But I guess it won't work very smooth. Yours no longer,

'LAURA.'

As he read his face changed terribly; but it was only for a moment; he recovered himself instantly, and crushed the note up in his hand.

'She will not be here at all to-night,' he said simply to the men around him, without a tremor either of passion or emotion in his voice. 'Tell the people, Wynch, that the piece is put off, and return them their money—doubled—at the doors.'

Wynch only stared anxiously at him.

'Damn you, sir! do you hear me?' said his master, calmly still, but with an accent in his voice which sent the wicked old man to obedience as fast as his legs could carry him.

'You may all of you go home now,' Beltran continued to the actors and actresses, who stood like scared sheep about him. 'Attend here to-morrow, at noon, as usual. Your salaries will continue.'

Then he put his hand on Denzil's arm.

'Come out with me, Derry.'

They turned to go; but at the moment the announcement that Wynch was making, in lieu of conciliating the people, only exasperated them. In the tumult of their rage they scarcely heard the offer of the double money, but only incensed at the deprivation of their evening's amusement—for at this house the drama counted for nothing, and the burlesque for everything—they became utterly unmanageable in the pit and gallery, and howled like a herd of hyænas.

'Clear the house!' cried Beltran, his voice ringing firm and imperious out as he paused, and abandoned his intention of quitting the scene.

'Easier said than done!' muttered Denzil.

'We shall have a free fight,' laughed Paget Desmond. 'I'm agreeable.'

'Call police, and clear the house,' said Beltran again, unheeding alike the terror of his actors and the chaff of his friends.

Old Wynch, before the fallen curtain, continued to shriek his entreaties to the public, all in vain. The roughs were strong in numbers, and rampant in injured feeling. They saw an exquisite opportunity for their vengeance, and the temptation to seize it proved irresistible. Pit and gallery rose on one impulse, hooting like owls, roaring like tigers, and set to work to damage and demolish everything that they could reach and seize.

The half-dozen men remaining in the stalls left their seats and came round to us by a passage which, as they were privileged frequenters of the wings, they knew by heart.

'House will be wrecked,' muttered Denzil. 'I'll swear she's sent a score of lambs in here on order.'

As he spoke, Beltran—forgetful that his name had never appeared to the public in connection with the Coronet since it was ostensibly licensed by the Chamberlain to old Wynch—left the flies, and displacing his manager, stood himself before the footlights.

'At the doors you will get your money doubled. I regret you have lost your night's amusement; but I will make you what amends I can,' he said to the infuriated mob, while his voice penetrated to the farthest corner of the theatre. 'As to your rioting, I shall not permit it; quit the house at once, or the law shall force you.'

For an instant they were too amazed at his unexpected and unexplained appearance to speak; but the pause lasted only that one fleeting second; the next the very calmness and contempt of his attitude and address infuriated them the more.

'Curse the swell,' roared a gigantic bully, who seemed to urge on the affray. 'Will ye give over a rare lark just for *his* cheek, lads?'

The words were the signal for a terrific onslaught. The men became lunatics, possessed and loosed; they tore the curtains down, they wrenched away the gilded scroll-work of the balconies, they broke the glass of the gas-burners, they pulled up the benches, and used them as levers and as mallets to work more destruction; they wreaked their rage upon the inanimate, harmless things, as a mob, once seized with the devil of ruin, always does in its blind rabies.

'The beasts!' swore Beltran under his breath. In another instant he and the four or five men of his own class who were behind the scenes had sprung across the orchestra-box, vacated in a rush by the terrified bandsmen, and were in the midst of the crowd and the worst of the combat.

I, as though the blood of all the mastiffs flowed furiously in my veins, stood with leonine courage before the floats, and barked my loudest, till I thought that I should shake the house down, Sampson-like, on friends and foes in one.

I have since been told that my loudest does not rise one note higher than the smallest wail of a penny trumpet; but this I do not believe. Fanfreluche has said it, and, besides the notorious fact that no female creature ever acknowledges excellence in what she has not done herself, it is well

known that all earthquaking thunders, whether of the orator's voice or the hero's cannon, are invariably pooh-poohed by those jealous of them, as the mere collapsing crack of broken windbags.

I must, however, in veracity, grant that the fulminations of my wrath took little perceivable effect on the combatants. The roughs, of whom there were this night unusual numbers in pit and gallery for this fashionable theatre, had begun wild work, and appeared only the more resolved to prosecute it to its worst issues, because 'the swells' endeavoured to prevent them. No scarlet-clothed matador ever more furiously enraged an Estremaduran bull than did the sight of these eight or ten men in evening dress infuriate the sweeps, and costermongers, and butcher-boys, and counter-jumpers, who had commenced the sack of the Coronet. 'The gentlemen,' hitting out straight with their old Oxford science, looked so cool, so tranquil, so contemptuous; and the roughs, hot, and dirty, and clamorous, and clumsy, were so thoroughly conscious of that immeasurable difference betwixt themselves and their adversaries, and hence grew only madder, fiercer, coarser, and more brutal. It was a duel of Class in its way; and bitter as class warfare ever must be: with disdain on one side, and hatred on the other.

Beltran and his friends were but as one against a score, a little knot of silent scornful men forcing their way, shoulder to shoulder, against a furious, yelling, tumultuous crowd; levelling their blows with fearful force when they did strike, and thinking, it seemed, less of saving the theatre from its wreckers than of chastising the audacity of the mob towards themselves. There were only ten of them, and there were some three hundred of the rioters; yes I felt the little Courcey girl was right as she cried breathlessly to the prompter, crouching terrified in his den, 'Ten thousand to nothin' on the swells, Davy; they'll beat, they'll beat, they'll beat!'

But Davy, crouching in his hood-like box, was far too white and frightened to accept or even hear the wager.

Meantime, every available weapon that could be torn or twisted out of wood and metal work, the mob seized and used. Fragments of gilded mouldings, of shattered glass, of coloured plaster, of carved decorations, flew hurtling

through the air. There was not an unbroken gas-globe left in the whole house. The central chandelier hung unhurt indeed aloft; but all its glittering glass stars and rays fell crashing to the floor under the missiles hurled against it. Howling, stamping, and struggling, they wreaked their passion on all things within their reach.

Never a word spoke Beltran; but he acted as his Order always acts when, out from the serenity and impassiveness of habit and of temper, the fire of a sudden furious scorn breaks into flame. The roughs went down like felled oxen before him; no stroke went home so surely and so cruelly as his, and here and there a rioter, glancing up and catching the look in his eyes, crouched, though unstruck, like a lashed hound before him. The mob knew by instinct that this man contemned them utterly, and would never fear them,—knew also that though his property was being destroyed before his eyes, there was a certain, fierce, cool, sweet delight in the mere sense of combat that had both pleasure and passion in it for the quiet aristocrat.

The actors and actresses had all fled away aghast by the stage-doors; the workmen and other people of the place hung aloof amongst the wings, unwilling to come forward. No constables had as yet arrived; there was Nellie, who kept her ground and watched the issue of the fight with an intense absorption into which no selfish fears had power to intrude. In all her fluttering gossamer, and golden glisten, and winged fairyism, painted and tinselled and spangled, she yet stood there with so much of youth, of eagerness, of fear, of vivid feeling and of tortured pain upon her face, that all the art and artifice, the coarseness, and the commonness, seemed dead, and all the tenderness and courage that were in her the only living ruling things that had their dominion over her.

Laura Pearl could never have been transfigured by emotion as this poor child was. She was only a little common girl, with a pretty baby face, that was her only fortune, and an ignorant little mind, that had slang songs, and obscene jests, and evil knowledge, and vulgar trickeries as its sole store of wisdom; she thought it fun to show her shapely form in posture dancing; she bared her pretty rounded limbs unthinking, to the gaze of the populace; she had never heard a gentle word, or caught the echo of a holy

thought throughout her brief hard life, whose laughter was more sorrowful even than its sobs.

Yet for the hour standing there, she was transfigured,—because she had not fear, and she had love.

The conflict probably had not endured ten minutes; but its uproar, its oaths, its ferocity, its insane frenzy of destruction, its noise of splitting wood, and trampled plaster, and falling glass, made it seem like a long-drawn-out battle. The broken benches, were already slippery with blood, the ground was already cumbered by the prostrate bodies of some half-score of the mob; the roughs employed every missile they could lay their grasp on, the gentlemen only used their science of attack and of defence; yet those neat, straight, calm blows were very pitiless, and took unerring effect. From the moment that the struggle had commenced, Beltran had striven to reach the ring-leader of the affray,—a huge brawny bully, who, standing erect at the back of the pit, had been the first to shout forth the signal for the wrecking. He appeared to perceive the efforts of 'the swells' to reach him, as he dodged them repeatedly, forced himself behind woodwork, or amongst a thick knot of his companions, and escaped that direct vengeance which he saw hung over him. At length, however, Beltran, with a leap like a stag's, sprang at, and reached him, and caught him by the throat.

Although the big brute was a giant, the gentleman in height outmatched him; but while Beltran was of slender build, and had lost strength from the manner of the life he led, his foe was of massive form and sinew; a mighty brawler, all made of bone and muscle. The conflict looked utterly unequal,—the delicately-fashioned man of pleasure looked to have no possible chance against the bully of the populace, strong as any bullock. As they closed, their faces were in as wide contrast as their forms—the one colourless, calm, intent, with the pale curved lips pressed close; the other flushed and swollen, and big-veined, with the great teeth locked like a mastiff's. I shuddered and closed my eyes for a moment—only one, when I looked again the man was down, and Beltran, with his hands still at the rioter's throat, shook him to and fro as though he were a child, and beat his great shock head against the iron pillar beside which he stood.

I saw then what the rage of a man, habitually calm and indifferent to an excess, can be when it at length is roused. All the pent passion in him, to which he had permitted no utterance, poured itself out now in physical violence.

The iron column was the one nearest the stage of all that row of fluted gilded metal shafts which ran the whole semicircle of the house, and gave it half its elegance and lightness. Thus he was very near to me and to the Wood-Elf. The girl gazed on in that wrapt fascination which the ferocity of physical struggles exercises over all women ; and I shared it with her. The writhing of the huge ruffian's body ; the impotent convulsions of his gigantic limbs ; the swellings of the black veins of his throat ; the gasping of his open mouth for words that would not come ; the dull thud as his skull was again, and again, and again dashed against the iron ; the contrast of the furious onslaught which thus dealt with him, and the look upon Beltran's face, which never lost its pitiless and immovable repose !—these had an awful fascination for both myself and her ; one which held us breathless, wonder-stricken, spell-bound.

'You will kill him, my lord,' gasped Nellie.

Beltran did not seem even to hear her voice.

'You will kill him, sir!' she cried out, her pretty chiming voice grown shrill and tremulous with fear ;—not fear for the death of the man of her own class, but fear for the issue of the passions that she for the first time saw roused and loosed.

The cry passed over the head of the one she supplicated, unheard or regarded. The girl, beside herself with agitation, and nerved by the strong impulsion of an impersonal terror, sprang down the six-foot depth that severed her from the ground-floor, and seized with both her hands the sleeve of Beltran's coat.

'You will kill him—my God!'

'Why not?' said Beltran, without looking up ;—and he struck the man's skull yet again against the iron column ; driving it home upon the metal as though he drove a nail in with a mallet.

The girl gazed with her great blue eyes dilating.

'Is he worth it, sir?' she dared to whisper.

Her instinct led her to say the only thing that could have touched him to attention in this hour.

His old, quiet, contemptuous smile came on his mouth in an instant.

'I doubt if he be,' he said indifferently, rather to the sense of her words than to their speaker; and he flung the man down with a crash upon the floor, where the huge body lay motionless, and the beaten brain throbbed slowly into stupor.

At that instant one of the many gas jets from which the glass globe had been shattered, flaring higher, caught one of the lace curtains of the pit tier boxes. There were a sheet of flame; a scent of burning stuffs; a puff of smoke; —they were enough.

The rioters, dominated only by the one sovereign impulse of self-preservation, ceased from their work of violence and ruin, and rushed pell-mell to seek their outward way through the narrow doors and passages.

Beltran saw the danger; it was in a favourite box of his own, where he would lie perdu sometimes after dinner, with only the jewelled arm, and the bouquet, and the lorgnon of his companion of the hour visible through those very draperies of blue silk and white lace, which were now consuming under flames. As he saw, he caught up a breadth of green baize which had been torn off the pit benches, reached up, grasped the burning curtain, and wrenched it down with no other cost than a scorched wrist. In two more seconds the danger which had threatened the theatre had died wholly away and only left the odour of charred wood lingering after it, and the naked framework of the box exposed.

But the terror it had inspired endured much longer; the crowd were blind and deaf to the fact of their own safety; the alarm of fire had killed all other memory in them. Like terrified sheep one moment, and raging wolves the next, they huddled together, then fought, and tore, and shrieked, and swore, and trampled one another underfoot in mad competition for pre-eminence in egress.

'They will do their own killing now!' said Beltran with that placid contempt which men of his character always feel for the excited agony and maniacal terror of a populace And he stood with that odd quiet smile on his face, looking on at the plunging, shrieking, struggling mass of his enemies as they fought their way out through the portals of the house which they had ruined.

It was no vengeance of his own seeking; but it was vengeance curiously swift and sure. That wild throng pouring from the doors, the stronger trampling down the weaker, the more ruffianly brutally forcing their passage over the trodden bodies of the feebler in the fight, the whole stream rushing outward, pent-up, broken, mad with fury, like a swollen mountain-stream hemmed in a narrow gorge, drew at last attention in the street without; and constables coming to the rescue were met by that screaming, terrified, maddened, living river.

At length the building was slowly cleared of the last of the mob that had disfigured, and striven to destroy, it. That last was the big bully. As they raised him his eyes opened and glared stupidly, yet with returning consciousness, around him.

They fell upon his conqueror.

He made a sign for Beltran to draw nigh him, and drew his breath tightly.

'It was all along o' *her*,' he gasped. 'Look'ee, ye've hit me hard, but I don't hate yer as I hate that devil, now all's said.'

'She set you on this to-night?'

'Damn! I ses she did,' gasped the wretch, his voice hoarse and almost inarticulate. 'I warn't no worse nor most, and I bore yer no grudge, though ye're a swell; but I seed her night after night in yer theayter, and I was mad on her, right on mad. She's the buxomest blowan as ever—'

'Never mind that, go on.'

'Yer minded it, as well as me. I ain't got no breath, I can't go on; not rightly. Yer see, them huzzies that yer swells take up with, they lags yer ready, but it's us as they sets their eyes on; they aren't never true to you swells, they allus git a lover somewheer out o' their own kind. It's a fact, don't go for to doubt it. You swells keep my lady, and my lady keeps Tom, and Dick, and Jerry unbeknown to ye! Lord, what game I've made of yer with her—'

He stopped, his breath failing him, and the great veins in his throat swelling like cords.

'Go on,' said Beltran simply; but the look in his eyes, under their lowered lids, was darker even than that which had been in them when he had hurled this man down at his feet.

'Go on! ye'd go on, choking like this,' gasped the other. 'She made a lord o' me for an hour or two—'tis them women's way—I'd yer wine and yer gold, and yer victuals and yer baccy, and you warn't never no wiser! Ye never are, none of ye. Ye dainty swells, ye're poor trash to wenches like her, they takes strappin' big blokes like me as'll beat 'em as soon as look at 'em. Eh? what was I telling ye? My head—he do buzz so. Handsome—ay, she's a rare un to look at, but a bad un to beat. She got sick 'o me, she kep me on and off like; I was a awful fool. Not such a fool as you, though. Well, days agone she seed me, just a minute like; and she telled me as how, if I'd wreck yer place to-night, she'd take me back to favour, and not never look at you no more. She sed she'd be in the theayter, and when the smash was done, she'd have me round in her own room; and we'd get dead drunk together and nobody'd come anigh her never agen but me. And I sed I was game for't, and I'd do it, and I'd get my pals about me like, so that there'd be the damndest row. And there *hev* been—eh? And now she aren't here, curse her—and they sed awhile agone close by me as she've a stole away with some other lord, and cheated you, and me, and all on us! And they'll give me the stone jug, and hard labour, just for this 'ere spree—damn her, damn her, damn her.'

And with the savage oaths rushing fiercely in a torrent of blasphemy from his purple lips, the man once again lost all sight or sense of where he was or what he said. No one had heard the strange confession.

'Take him away,' said Beltran quietly, turning to the police, 'and have him as well cared for as you can, at my cost.'

Then he turned to his own friends: 'They can do without us now; and we have had enough of it, I think. Won't you come and have some supper?'

The other men assented willingly, they were heated and bruised, two or three of them had contusions; and all were thirsty and tired.

'It's a happy thing they did not know where the wines were,' said Beltran with a little laugh, as he motioned his friends to precede him through the familiar ways. 'There was something worth wrecking in them, if they'd only guessed it.'

He lingered behind the rest, and approached the Wood-Elf who stood by, very pale, so that her rouge burned with a hectic fire, and her large blue eyes looked black and humid in her little plaintive face.

He took her hand, with a grave and gracious respect in the action.

'I thank you sincerely, Nellie,' he said gravely, 'you saved me from a passion that disgraced me.'

It was very gracefully said, this acknowledgment from a man commonly so contemptuous to his kind, and so reticent of all manifestation of feeling; and it took a strange effect on the poor little dancer.

She trembled in all her limbs till her bright silvery wings shook like those of a frightened dove. If a season earlier he had given her a jewelled trifle and a flattery she would have received both with a saucy laugh; the touch and the words, that had as much reverence in them as though they were given to his sister or his wife, moved her curiously to a passionate sense of pain and of unworthiness.

'It was a rough scene for you, Nellie,' he continued gently, noting her embarrassment and her emotion, though not witting of their cause. 'You were a brave little soul to stand by us through it. Come to supper with me, and have some claret-cup to shake off those horrors.'

The girl shrank back.

'Not now, my lord,' she murmured; 'not to-night. I couldn't, I couldn't!'

He looked at her quietly, and understood something of what was moving her—moving a little ignorant, childish, burlesque dancer whom he paid ten shillings a night—to reject an honour and a pleasure that a week earlier would have raised her to the height of ecstasy and triumph.

He dropped her hand and did not press her further. But he stooped to her with that graver sweeter accent in his voice which Laura Pearl had never heard.

'You are as well away, little one. Go home; and keep your bright and honest courage untarnished if you can. When you want a friend—rely on me.'

Then he went on his way to his supper-room.

The customary attendants had fled in terror; but the supper was set forth as usual on the table, and he bade them welcome to it. He was easy, tranquil, indifferent, in

no way altered from his habitual manner; and but for the disorder of his attire and his inability to use his left arm, there appeared no sort of change in him. I shivered at what seemed such almost inhuman self possession. It is true, I was famished and unnoticed; all things look dark to us in such a case.

As they sat down there was a buzz of voices crossing one another in a fiery fury of excited talk; when it lulled a little, Paget Desmond's ringing mellow voice came straight athwart the table in a point blank question:

'Vere! You have never told us—what's amiss with Laura?'

'Nothing is amiss with her.'

The voices fell; all the eyes of his guests turned wonderingly on Beltran.

'Nothing!' echoed the guardsman in amaze. 'Nothing? Then why on earth didn't she show?'

'Caprice!' put in Denzil hastily, divining that there was something wrong with his friend. 'Last winter, in Paris, Ysaffich paid a forfeit of twelve hundred francs, and, what was more astonishing, left her great part to be filled up by her most detested rival, for a mere piece of obstinacy and ill-temper, and the determination to spend that particular evening in a dinner with Russians at the Café Madrid, as she had made a wager to spend it.'

'But that wasn't a first night, surely?'

'It would have made no difference to Ysaffich if it had been. She would have beggered herself of everything she possessed to carry out her caprice, and win her wager?

'The wager was a big stake, then?'

'The wager was a box of sugared chestnuts from Siraudin's! Nothing more on either side. Paget, on my word, you don't know women if you can't estimate the overwhelming ecstasy that lies for them in having their own way, even when their own way is their own ruin.'

'Well—is Laura dining anywhere, then, like Ysaffich?' persisted Desmond, who was the biggest and most good-humoured of guardsmen, but slow to comprehend or to follow a hint. 'It's deuced cool and ill-natured of her if she be—making all this row!'

'What on earth will poor Beaufort say? He begged me to telegraph how the piece went,' said Dudley Moore. He

spoke of the author of the extravaganza—a clever graceful jester, who was imprisoned by a sudden attack of illness.

'Beaufort need not despair,' said Beltran, with a certain inflection of coldness and of authority in his voice. 'It is only a question of delay. His interests will not suffer.'

'Pardon me. It is not in your power to promise that. The public—'

'The public! Well! What of the public?'

'Is not a turnspit dog that will come at your bidding to roast every joint you may put to the fire; and it certainly won't be inclined to perform its good offices for one of which it has once been balked as a meal.'

'No? And yet how contentedly it lives, famished on the crumbs which the Press scatters to it from the begged crusts of borrowed opinions! At any rate, Mr. Beaufort shall have what justice I can procure for him; and what compensation money can offer.'

'That is very amiably said,' interrupted the great editor. 'But it seems to me that you utterly ignore the fact that it was the absence of a favourite actress to-night, not any hitch or fault in the presentation of the piece, that caused the *émeute* yonder. Now it will be exceedingly difficult to please the public with that same piece anyhow. It is as bad as champagne that has been uncorked but not drunk; whatever vintage it might be from, whatever sparkle it might once possess, it is flat and flavourless now. To produce it at all will be of very doubtful wisdom; not in your interests, I fancy, certainly not in Beaufort's; but to produce it without Laura Pearl in it will be sheerly and simply an impossibility.'

'Why so?'

Beltran asked the question coldly and curtly, and a darkness came into his gray, tranquil eyes.

'Why so! Can you ask? And you have known the theatrical public all these years!'

'And so have I,' dashed in Denzil. 'And I could see your meaning fast enough if you were talking of an actress of mind, of talent, of taste; but we are only talking of a handsome woman who dresses well, and does breakdowns. There are scores of them to be had at the music-halls.'

Dudley Moore laughed a little, grimly.

'We are talking of a woman who—be it through beauty

or breakdowns—ingratiates herself sufficiently with her audience for them to pull the house down because she don't appear. This popularity of hers makes her as necessary to the success of this establishment, as though she were a Grisi or a Ristori. I am not paying her a compliment. If the public get accustomed to seeing a performing monkey at a certain house, and like the monkey, and find salt in its antics and tricks, it will make a fearful row if the monkey be absent from any piece performed at that theatre. It considers itself cheated, in point of fact; cheated out of its pet spectacle and diversion.'

'You are not very gallant to the absent!' cried Denzil.

'I am not seeking to be gallant! I am stating a fact. You say she is of no consequence because she is only a burlesque actress; I say she would be of just us much consequence if she were only a monkey. However, I am talking on the premise that either her caprice of non-appearance (whatever its cause) is to continue, or that our friend here is irritated enough by it to resent it by her future exclusion.

'O, hang it!' cried Desmond in dismay. 'I say;—we can't do without Laura. She's no end of fun in those flip-flaps. He won't cut up rough with her for this—will you, Beltran?'

'Colonel Desmond, you forget that we are all of us unenlightened as to the cause of the lady's absence, and consequently so as to the extent of her offences and the duration of her exile,' said Dudley Moore, with dry cruel unction.

Beltran himself, thus directly appealed to, once more could no longer evade answer.

'I don't fancy you will any of you be likely to see her in this place again,' he said very calmly; 'as for the cause,—I don't think that much matters to anybody. Ysaffich's sweetmeats only concerned those who had to pay for them.'

There was the strange quiet smile about his mouth as he spoke, with which he had watched the rioters rush on their own destruction; everybody at the table felt that the subject was not one to be pursued with him; even Desmond gathered that it might be best to drop the topic, and even Dudley Moore's bitter tongue remained for once inactive.

Beltran, with his easy languid laugh, changed the theme by a brief and witty story. It was very seldom that he ever took the trouble to amuse people: when he did no one could do it with more effect or greater charm. He chose to do it this evening, and succeeded.

The conversation grew brisk, and gay, and bright with genuine mirth; the wines were admirable, the men's tempers were heated. They drank perhaps a little more than they ought to have done; but the laughter if continuous was always good-natured and always genuine.

I no longer thought Beltran callous and heartless; he seemed to me a very marvel of self-command and of courage.

To be sure, by this time, he had given me food in abundance and a drink of water, which made me regard him through Claude glasses. But, my very dear people, you do just the same: when your master, the world, keeps you starving, you, in your cynical hunger, murmur at its coldness and harshness; it is a Saturn that devours its children, it is a Nero that fiddles while you are shrieking in agony, it is a Commodus that sees men tear each other to death for his pleasure, it is a Judas that betrays his Master, it is an Israel that crucifies all divinity! But if the world only toss you a cake, only keep you well fed and well fattened, what a good and a fair world it is, how full of all sweetness and light, how true in its vision, how pure in its excellence; fruitful as Ceres, smiling as young Hebe, tender as the virginal mother of Krishna, many-breasted as the Carthaginian goddess by whom all the multitudes of men might be nurtured!

And you are as sincere in your worship as in your curses, only you are an optimist in both.

When the supper-party broke up it was noisily and joyously; there had been no gayer or pleasanter night at the Coronet than this which followed on so wild a combat.

Beltran saw his guests out by the private door, and laughed them a careless good-night.

It was only one in the morning when he reached his chambers; but two and three and four were chimed by the clocks, and he never moved from the chair into which he had cast himself.

Once his lips quivered with rage, though they had laughed

so lightly and so listlessly all the past hours through. His heart indeed had not been pierced by the blow dealt him that night; he had never loved this woman, save with the slight, soulless, inconstant passion which a loveliness purely physical evokes. But he was deeply wounded in his pride, and in that form of self-love yet stronger than pride, which makes a discovered infidelity so bitter to any man, even in a wife or mistress who has lost all charm, and from whom release is ardently desired. It was horrible to the haughty and exclusive gentleman to be thus cheated and betrayed; to be thus cast to the jests of the town; to be fooled like any boy in his earliest youth; to be made the dupe and the laughing-stock of a woman drawn from the dregs of the populace!

When his ignoble rival had panted out his confession of hatred and treachery, Beltran had suffered one of the keenest indignities that a man of his temperament could have endured.

For the opinion of the world, when he himself chose to provoke it, he cared not one straw; but the opinion of the world when he knew himself a fit subject for its mockery was a very different thing to endure.

He had been universally successful in his intrigues; he had been uniformly more the sought than the seeker of women; he was unsparing in his contemptuous ironies on those who were the fools of their own amours; he was given to believing, and to imbuing others with his own belief, in his perfect keenness of vision, and infallibility of judgment; he had as little of vanity and as much of it as a man of fine instinct and cool sense, but spoiled by a society that has too greatly deferred to him, usually possesses. Above all, he was intensely proud.

The blow fell on the most sensitive nerves of his nature, and the curse that he breathed through his teeth upon his traitress could hardly have been deeper or fiercer if a cheated idolatry and a wronged worship had spoken in it. His pride had been pierced to the quick and abased in the dust; it is a less forgiving and a more terrible enemy than the most cruelly outraged love, for its wounds are far slower to cure, and its scars far slower to fade.

When five o'clock struck, and the last spark of flame died out from the gray ashes in the grate, he was still there;

cast backwards in the great depths of the chair, and gazing out at the dead embers of the fire, as though in its dreary shadows he saw the ghosts of his own dead years: years whose strength had been spent, and whose resolves had been stifled, and whose purer dreams and higher desires had breathed out their faint life for ever, under the murderous embraces, and the poisoned kisses, of harlots.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LA PIPETTA.

About ten o'clock in the morning the valet was commonly used to knock at his master's door, and being bidden to enter, would carry in some coffee or some soda and brandy, and such letters as had come by the early post. At that hour I was always accustomed to run in likewise; and, perching myself on Beltran's bed, to eat the coffee-sugar, and watch him whilst he glanced through his correspondence. It was generally a great amusement to me, for being of quick intelligence, I had soon learned to guess from what fair hand each epistle came by its very air and aspect, to say nothing of its monogram, and it was a little comedy to me to see the weariness, the impatience, the contemptuous amusement, or the curt dismissal, which were what he generally bestowed on these delicate, tempting, and glossy letters, which the writers doubtless had conceived would be so welcome or so terrible to him, according as they wooed him or reproached him. This morning, for once, the servant's rap was not answered by a permission to enter; but Beltran, with the only savage oath I ever heard him use, bade the man begone and the letters also. Even to my whine and moan no heed was paid by him; and I sat outside the inaccessible chamber, tired in patience and wounded in heart.

Neglected by my master, bewildered, saddened, and perplexed by the strange events of the past night, I did a foolish thing. I incautiously wandered down the stairs, and finding the house-door standing open, I went forth into the street.

It was a sunny frosty morning, and people were astir; it was bright and busy and tempting. There are, in our race, natural and nomadic instincts that no education or captivity can eradicate—an inborn passion for freedom and enjoyment. This, in man, is damned with texts by your priests, and, in dogs, is chastised with stripes by your keepers. But, as a rule being of itself innocent, and desirable, and even noble, it is too strong always for either priests or keepers; and under the damnation or the dog-whip will turn the man criminal and the dog mad. This instinct awaking in me, and I, being a little foolish guileless thing, deprived by my mode of life of many of my proper qualities of self-preservation and of foresight, and rendered helpless and dependent against my very will, was vaguely moved by it, and, knowing no better, moved to my own destruction.

I wandered down the street, playing with the rusty leaves that blew along the pavement, feeling pleasure in the fresh wind that wantoned among my curls, and thinking of no evil, because meaning none. The leaves were always escaping me, and always running gaily on; and I ran after them, wondering, indeed, how such poor, shrivelled, brown, and aged things had heart in them for play, when they knew, as they could not fail to know, that their day was done for ever, that they never more could toss in western winds and summer suns, but had no other thing to do than to drift dully on, and die.

For I was young and did not guess that the leaves, though so worn and sere and useless, are all unconscious of their fate, and murmur amongst each other of their spring-time and their forest as though they were tossing still aloft, and had not known decay, even as the old amongst you 'babble of green fields,' and do not see their grave. I chased the leaves, and the leaves outstripped me. I ran unwittingly through many tortuous turns of streets. Just as, triumphant at the last, I caught my playfellows and found them rotten, useless, frail as timber, a black shadow fell between me and the light; a black cloth was flung over my head and body; I was seized, crushed into silence, and borne away.

When I saw the light again, I was in the horrible den of Bill Jacobs.

'He's got to be a cussed pretty beast,' said the brute as he surveyed me. 'I sha'n't chance a reward: rewards is

plants now with them swells. He's worth two ponies, and I'll get two ponies for him.'

* * * * * *

I have a dim recollection of blows, bruises, foreign tongues, bewilderment, dark dens, sharp whipcord, sickness from a curious motion, and imprisonment in some floating dungeon. But what I distinctly recall, as the first picture on my mind after the renewal of the hideous scenes of bloodshed and suffering at Bill Jacobs', are, a sky of the deepest and most radiant blue, and a vivid quivering sunlight, that seemed alive in its intensity; a crumbled wall, all clothed with a green that I knew later as that of the acanthus; a herd of goats, a huge barrel upon wheels, and a small cream-hued, fox-like face, that was peering close against mine.

'*Ruzzola*—Pepe—I do not understand?'

'Well, I can tell you no more. Pepe is a servant to a *marchesa*, whose villa is close by; and he had been sent to fetch you from the English ship; some English friend had bought you as a gift to the *marchesa;* and lo! as Pepe was between the town and the villa, we overtook him at a little village. The *contadini* were playing *ruzzola;* and Matteo was giving them wine; and he challenged Pepe, and Pepe set you down and went to play in right fierce earnest. They are all alike, these Italians: give them a spade or a mattock, and they die perspiring in ten minutes; but show them a ball, or a disk, or something to gamble with, and they will fag themselves at it from siesta to sunset! So they got to play, these two, and they presently waxed furious at it. That wine is fresh from the vat, and Matteo does not water it for his own drinking! Old Pepe had staked every coin he had on him before they had played half an hour. The luck was at see-saw, and lured him on; then it set dead against him, and still he played. He staked his pipe, he staked his buttons, he staked his shoes, and before he had done he had stripped himself nearly bare. Then he went mad, and he staked you.'

'Hush!' said the owner of that face, in the tongue of my own kind. 'Hush! I will not hurt you—I am Spirka.'

'Spirka,' I echoed—the name conveyed no meaning to me, and I did not know where I was.

'Yes; I am Spirka, the Pomeranian. I live in the little hooded house there up on the wine-cart. That is Matteo

my master, yonder, giving a drink to the goat-herd. O, it is no matter; he will fill up the cask from the well! No one will be the wiser; and the wine is not his, you know. Are you in pain now?'

I groaned that I was.

'That is bad,' said the sympathetic Spirka. 'You have been in my house three weeks, and have seemed to know nothing.'

'I know nothing now. What has happened? Where am I?'

'You are on the road between Civita Vecchia and Rome. And you are in my wine-cart. You were knocked over by one of the wooden rounds at *ruzzola*. That is one of our games, you know. Matteo got playing at it with your Pepe, and Pepe knocked you over; they thought you were killed. So did I—'

The Pomeranian paused, and I shivered; though you make your own selves so often into helpless counters on the green-table of fortune, you have no idea how horrible it is to a dog to feel that he has been a mere stake, thrown for as a thing of no feeling—of no volition—of no vitality. A man very often will game himself away till he has no more shame or sentient power than his dice; but a dog never does this, and never loses his self-respect or his sensitiveness.

'Staked—and lost you,' continued the communicative Spirka. 'You were the property of his mistress—a present from a foreign land—a thing of price entrusted to his care. He shrieked, he raved, he cursed himself and you; then up he lifted his wooden disk, and let it fly with furious force. It struck you as he meant it should; and as it stretched you senseless on the grass, he took to his heels and fled, howling like a beast—fled before Matteo's knife could reach him. Every one thought you were dead; but Matteo thought not. Anyhow, he put you up here beside me, and gave you a chance of your life. And you are alive.'

In my present state, the declaration appeared to me premature and unconclusive; however, as I certainly breathed, heard, and saw, I did not dissent openly from it. I ventured to ask why Matteo had not taken me to this *marchesa*, who was to be my fate.

'Pooh!' said Spirka contemptuously. 'He won you

fairly, at *ruzzola*. It was not for him to turn out of his road for a strange woman and a foreign dog. What would she have given him for a little beast with two ribs broken as yours were? He would have had the stick for getting at games with Pepe, and you would have been thrown neck and crop down a well. Do not get asking rude questions, or I will give you a shake with my teeth.'

'Would it be rude to ask what is Rome?' I panted timidly.

'Rome? I heard a man say once that it was an eternal archaism, uttered in marble—whatever that may have meant. It is the place we take our wines to, that is all I know. We shall soon be there.'

'Is it in England?'

'England! England is a little bit of mud floating in the middle of a duck-pond—I have heard Americans say so.'

'It is not! It is a noble place—a great place!' I panted, patriotism coming on me, though I knew not one country from another.

'Pshaw! Nothing is either noble or great except Raulthelhautszeim!' responded Spirka, swelling with scorn and pride.

'And what is Raulthelhautszeim?' I asked appalled at the mere rolling grandeur of the quadrupedal word.

'My village!' responded the Pomeranian with dignified emphasis; and thereon fell a-barking at a goat who had strayed nearer the cart-wheels than Spirka deemed fitting.

I, with my scarcely-healed ribs, lay still and silent among the straw, in the little pent-house over the shafts. The extreme strangeness of the scene, and the marvellous effulgence of the sunlight, stupefied me.

'What time in the year is it?' I asked faintly at length.

'December,' the Pomeranian answered in a brief pause of his breathless tirade at the obnoxious goat.

It had been in November that I had been seized by Jacobs. Ignorant as I was of time, or of occurence, I arrived at the conclusion that I must have been sold by the thieves to some purchaser who had consigned me hither. And this conclusion very naturally explained all the imprisonment, suffering, and bewildering torments that I had endured, and which were all blurred in my memory into one indistinct maze of half-obliterated wretchness.

Matteo came to his place on the cart; the horse with its bedizened leathern harness, jogged on; the wheels creaked, the bells jingled; the huge wine-cask was drawn slowly along; and I lay motionless, exhausted, and frightened amongst the straw.

And thus we moved on through the great, golden, silent waste, all alive indeed with glorious-coloured insects, and waving, various-hued grasses, and shrill grasshoppers trilling under the leaves, and wise-faced bearded goats straying under broken arches and gazing down from vine-wreathed ruins; but yet withal so still, so strange, so death-like.

The road was uneven; the day was hot; Matteo did not urge his horse—in point of fact, he was asleep almost all the way, trusting doubtless to the vigilance of Spirka.

Slumber, and your dog will guard you; it is only your human friend who will sieze that hour of your eyelids' closing to steal your purse, or press adulterous kisses on your darling's lips, or bid your children mock you for a sluggard.

So we moved slowly on, through that wondrous blinding sunlight, which seemed as though no clouds could ever darken, and no rainfall ever soften it; moved on through two days, resting innumerable times, and covering but a very few roods in an hour.

The horse paused at a little town, whose name is needless here; a little cluster of dwellings lying, as your Campagna village often does, among deep cork-woods, and old chestnut-trees; with quaint gray houses, and ancient walls made lovely by the lichens, and great wells everywhere, into which for ever waterspouts were emptying themselves with sweet cool soothing measure.

Spirka barked loudly; Matteo awoke; looked lovingly for a moment at the open door of a tavern, then descended before it. The wine, to whomsoever it belonged, seemed likely to be long upon its journey Romewards.

A handsome, good-tempered, dark-eyed woman bade him welcome joyfully; and after setting him down to a meal at a little round table in the ivy hung balcony; brought to me and to Spirka a plateful of rice, and of what they call macaroni.

Before I had a chance to touch a portion of it, Spirka swept the whole up with his tongue.

'What right had you to do that?' I murmured wofully; 'some was mine.'

'Right!' snapped Spirka, 'I like your impudence. Why, I am a Prussian!'

Who does not believe in nationalities?

I wonder if Europe will ever do as the good-natured Roman woman did? She boxed Spirka's ears (who took it quietly, as she was so much bigger than he), and then she served me afresh with some food by myself.

There was a black-browed, handsome, thievish-looking man sitting in the balcony with a box of musical puppets beside him. He looked at it and spoke to Matteo.

Soon afterwards he came down from the balcony, and took me out of the wine-cart and shook and pinched, and tormented me in that peculiar manner whereby you men imagine that you test an animal's value, and health and temper. He was clad in greasy sheepskins, he had a sly cruel gleam in his great black eyes, and he looked sluggish, brutal, and a rogue to boot. I trembled beneath his slightest touch.

'What didst give for him, Matteo?' I heard him ask.

'I won him at *ruzzola*,' the wine-carrier replied.

'Art in the mood to sell him?' asked the puppet-player.

'Ay, ay,' assented Matteo. 'I have no wish for him. I'll stake him again at a game of *morra*, if thou wilt, against five *baiocchi*.'

'Done!' cried the other Roman, with all his nation's passion for hazard and for lottery set on fire.

So they commenced playing.

I, trembling in the hooded house of Spirka, was powerless whilst my fate swung in the balance. It was one of the greatest moments of mental agony that I had ever known. They played that wild, strange ancient game of *morra*, which with its antics, its vociferations, its twinkling, dazzling, ceaseless movement of the fingers, so utterly bewilders the stranger who watches it. They looked to me like maniacs. But to be sure if dogs ruled in the world, they would very often raise the cries of 'Rabies!' against very many human actions and grimaces.

A man wheeling round in the maze of a waltz; a man frantically tearing over the turf in a running match; a man laboriously beating the water with two flat wooden blades;

a man solemnly blowing forth fire-smoke from his mouth and nostrils; a man furiously battling with twenty others for the right to kick a big ball into space—do not all and any of these look infinitely more like insanity than a poor dog just speeding in a straight line to the river-side on a hot summer's day.

This frantic and foolish battle came to an end in favour of the puppet-player.

My heart sank within me. The wine carrier had a frank, good-humoured, sunny face that inspired me with some trust, but the mere touch and glance of this *fantoccini* owner froze my blood.

He saluted me with a blow by way of greeting, on entering into possession of my little captive body.

'Ho! In a week's time thou wilt jump about like an eel in a frying-pan!' he cried to me; and nodding and laughing a good-bye to Matteo, he threw me roughly on the top of his music-box, and hoisting it on his shoulders, departed from the hostelry.

'What an ass thou hast been, Matteo!' the woman of the house said, as we moved away. 'To have lost at a game of *morra* a little beast like that, who looks worth his weight in silver!'

Matteo hung his head, looking wild with himself for his greed and his loss. Spirka barked a loud farewell, but I think he was glad to reign once more alone on his throne of the wine-cart, where he had so long been supreme.

As for me, I went with a bitter heart, and a trembling brain, forth on fresh travels, seated on the slanting roof of the box in which the puppets of my new master reposed. Ah! how I wished—the first of a thousand such futile wishes—that since we were made to be delivered over to be the slaves of man, we had been created deaf and dumb, as those wooden *burattini*, and not cursed with nerves, and fibres, and affections, and instincts, that are never of any other use to us save only to make us suffer!

I had indeed cause so to wish; for the time of my most intense torture was now at hand. I had never suffered like it ere then—in truth, I doubt if any human being ever knows such suffering, even in the worst agonies of your prisons, your mines, and your mad-houses.

My taskmaster, whose name was Giacone, known amongst

the populace as Già, proved the tyrant his look had betokened. He was indeed merciless beyond all description; and the brutalities and privations he inflicted on me came, of course, with tenfold more torture to me because of the peace and comfort—and latterly the extravagant luxury—of the life I had chiefly led. With the exception of the time passed in Jacobs' power, I had never had anything to prepare me for the misery I endured with this Roman slave-driver.

In the first place, he scarcely fed me, save just enough to keep my life in me; in the second, he fettered my limbs into a little coat and cap that were to me what the fetters of iron are to your prisoners; in the third, he exercised every ingenuity of torment in the process of what he called my education—*i. e.* the endeavour to make me dance, jump, posture, and go through card tricks to the sound of his organ-music.

And this reminds me to tell you what idiots you are when you beat your dogs as you do; a puppy is thrashed within an inch of his life to teach him 'intelligence!' Intelligence, forsooth! when you have dazed the poor bewildered brain, and confused all the struggling senses, with physical pain! In educating a dog for sport, for instance, remember that you are educating him *against* all his natural instincts, though to your own uses—*i. e.* you want him to stand still and point, when nature would tell him to dash forwards; you insist on his not ruffling an inch of either fur or feather in retrieving, when instinct would lead him to eat up the whole bird or beast; you swear at him for not sneaking step by step at your heel, when every fibre of his body, and every pulse of his limbs, are quivering with longing to be 'at them;' you require, in a word, every law of his being to be either violated or altered, to serve your purpose and pleasure.

This being the case, you proceed to instruct him in these offences against his own habits by the brutal stripes of that foul instrument of torture, a dog-whip; and when you have made every muscle throb with pain, and bewildered all his mind with internal suffering and piteous terror, you wonder at his 'stupidity,' and curse him or shoot him because he does not obey your word on the instant. O, how wise you are and how just!—if there be a spectacle on earth to re-

joice the angels at is your treatment of the animals that you say God has given unto you!

It is not for me, a little dog, to touch on such awful mysteries; but—sometimes—I wonder, if ever He ask you how you have dealt with His gift, what will you answer then?

If all your slaughtered millions should instead answer for you—if all the countless and unpitied dead, all the goaded maddened beasts from forest and desert who were torn asunder in the holidays of Rome; and all the innocent, playful, gentle lives of little homebred creatures that have been racked by the knives, and torn by the poisons, and convulsed by the torments, of your modern science, should, instead, answer, with one mighty voice, of a woe, no longer inarticulate, of an accusation no more disregarded, what then? Well! Then, if it be done unto you as you have done, you will seek for mercy and find none in all the width of the universe; you will writhe, and none shall release you; you will pray and none shall hear.

Where was I?

Ah! let me pass quickly over the pain of that cruel time!

I do not wish to dwell on this portion of my life.

Già was at his best but a rough taskmaster, and at times a very brutal one. He taught me many accomplishments, as I have said, such as begging for food, as erect as a sentinel; marching on my hind legs; shouldering a piece of stick as a musket; taking wonderous leaps over a stretched cord; and finally putting a little cap on my head, and sitting gravely in a chair with a pipe in my mouth. As I was excessively small, the pipe was a very small one also; and as this was a very favourite attitude with my audiences, I gained the name in Italy of Pipetta.

Like most other brilliant amusers of the public I was weary enough at heart; and though I looked so gay and gilded to the *contadini* in my little scarlet coat, and my little cap with the gold band, as I went through my tricks, I wished over and over again that I were dead, and ached in every bone of my little body from blows and from hunger. I went through my dances and my postures trembling with terror, till in the burning days I was as cold as ice; and I only costumed and capered from dread of the lash and

starvation, as you men of wit coin their brain from the dread of poverty and a prison.

It was a miserable, toilsome, sordid life I led; one mechanical routine of stereotyped antics; one ceaseless round of mimicry of that joy of which my heart gave not one echo.

I was the envy of all the children for that little red coat of mine, that little gilded cap, that little pipe I smoked, that little tambourine I played.

Dogs were too wise to envy me, for they knew that I was not free; and I—I envied every dog I saw that roved at large, though with a soiled coat and a hungry body; every dog that barked from his heap of straw outside his master's *loggia;* every dog that drove his herd of goats to and from their milking; every dog that followed some homely, honest, simple duty, and owned a kindly hand that would caress him now and then, and a wooden house that he could call his own.

To be a goat-herd's dog; to sleep on a fragrant bed of dried wild thyme; to bask in the soft warm dawns, and slumbrous evening shadows; to wake to the memory of a pleasant duty to be done to the chime of tinkling bells; to drink and splash at will in the hillside brooks, and to watch the old wise-looking bearded goats nibbling at the green wild vine shoots—what happiness it seemed to me! How passionately I envied, as I passed, them; all shabby and shaggy though their coats might be!

Some of these dogs, doubtless, were sometimes roughly treated; sometimes hungered, and smarted, and were foot-sore, and sun-heated. But they were free; and they had not to go through that dreary desolate pantomime of mimicked gaiety, while their hearts were breaking!

Ah! you pity your hewers of wood and drawers of water, you weep for those who do your rude hand-toil that needs no thought, and live in the open air of moor and meadow blown on by all fresh winds of heaven. Guard your compassion rather for those who must still pipe for you, though you no longer dance; who must wear the festal robes of frivolity though famine gnaw at their entrails, and despair devour their hearts.

You laugh! You can see no parallel betwixt a little woe-begone anticking dog, and the men and the women of

genius? Well it may seem foolish; yet believe me they have nearer kindred than you think; that one close terrible kindred of woe, and solitude, and bondage, and the iron cruelty of mimicked mirth.

My life endured thus for a year. I saw and heard much in the many wanderings which we made through all the Papal States; much which remains on the copper-plate of recollection, in sharp and defined outline; since there is no aquafortis that bites in so sharply as misery.

There are many beautiful pictures which arise in my memory, of earth and sky, of colour and form, of night and day; of the majestic old-world beauty of the women, and of the quaint, poetic, rich-hued life in the vineyards and cornfields, in the hill-side *osteria*, or the harvest-season's out-door camp. But other and worther than I have painted these again, and again, and again, ever since the world was young. All the universe knows the smell of the Parma violets, and the taste of the waters of Trevi; the wail of the *pifferari*, and the chant of the barefooted monks; the frank sweet light of the Roman smile, and the deep strong stench of the Roman cabbage. Why should I dwell on these?

Though the sun was so cloudless, and the smile so fair, and the sod so thick with flowers, the time was dark and drear to me. A time of desolation.

Now and again some girl, drawing the metal pail up from her fountain, would pity my little, dust-stained way-worn face, and give me a drink from the clear Virgine water, and a kiss from her arched, ruddy lips.

Now and again some old woman, seated at sunset under the vine-hung gallery of her house, telling her beads in the cool calm decline of day and of age, would lift her voice, and bid my master cease to beat me, as he passed.

Now and again some gentle-eyed priest, with a wistful pain and peace together on his face, would take me up, and murmur a kind word to me, and pause at a stall in the street to buy me a little fried fish, all golden and shining from the stove.

But these were few.

For the most part people are cruel, cruel if only from lack of thought. And they were cruel to me. The children in especial; children are cruel everywhere. Few

indeed of the virtues are inborn; and the virtue of mercy, rarely—very rarely—ever runs in the quick, gay, self-moved blood of youth.

The children were cruel always. When they wished me to dance, I had to dance, though I died. When I made, through fright, an error in my tricks, they stoned me and bawled at me. When I had walked round and round on two feet, till I was sick and giddy with the strain, and fell, they screamed to my owner to beat me for the fault—that fault of my weakness which injured their pastime.

The children were cruel always—those brown handsome, graceful creatures, with the limbs of gods and the eyes of angels. So cruel they were, that at length when I saw children drawing nigh I would shiver, and moan, and seek to hide myself under a stone. In vain! Unerringly they would hunt me out, and riot, and scream, and tear me from one and another, till Già, for the sake of my value, would rescue me from their clamour and their grip, half dead.

Therefore, that time is very hideous, very hateful, to me.

And it seemed to me always, that in this Latin land the very earth, by reason of its drought, and pain, and the innumerable dead it hid, was cruel likewise; and that even the sun, burning through so many weeks and months without one drop of rain, grew hard, and horrible, and rather shed death than begat life, with its unquenched rays.

There used to come upon me an infinite longing for the cool grey mists, the cool brown shadows, the dewy grasses damp at noon, the wild west wind sea-fed in summer, that I had known in that old north-country of my birth.

It is a *thirst*, I think—such as birds caged in cities feel—which devours us with so terrible a desire when we, who drew our first breath in the shady stillness of green northern woods, burn, and stifle, and grow blind in the merciless glare of southern suns. I suffered far more, also, because of the indulgence and luxury of my late brief enjoyment of a life of fashion. I had known what it was to be an idol of society, to be sunned in the smiles of coquettes, and to be caressed by the hands of great ladies; my palate had been attuned to dainty living, and my taste to all the gay frivolities and charming follies of the world of pleasure, only—as it seemed—that I might suffer more acutely from the degradation of my fate and the misery of my captivity.

I thought how wicked I had been to scorn all those poor dancing girls, who slaved for the popular amusement on a miserable pittance. I, too, knew now what it was to be the slave of the public, to be in the dress of the mime, to have to dance with aching limbs, and play with an aching heart.

How often I had joined with Fanfreluche in her merciless ridicule of these poor jaded, tired, rouged, and spangled coryphées of the burlesque; how often I had scoffed with her at their poverty and their sorrows; at the faded prints and the ragged shawls of their own day-attire, contrasted with the gorgeous dresses in which they flashed and glittered in the gaslight; at the hard bread and strong cheese they nibbled by stealth, while they waited for rehearsal; at the tears that gushed into their eyes, under the coarse oaths and brutal vituperations of their stage tyrant; at the piteous fashion in which they would trudge forth on foot into the rainy or snowy midnight, they, who went skipping and bounding, and whirling and laughing before the footlights, as though they had not a care in the world, or a need in the universe!

I knew not what it was to go through this mimicry of gaiety, this ostentation of radiant mirth, with grief in the heart and famine in the body. I knew what it was to long to lie down and die, yet be forced to rise and caper, and seem merry, because a ruthless Public cried—'Dance, dance, dance! Shall ye dare to be weary or sorrowful when *we* have bid ye be joyous, and have bought your joy with our money?'

Alas! If I had been cruel from the levity and the thoughtlessness of young years, my sin was visited very heavily upon me.

And another sin too,—my momentary oblivion of my first beloved home, seemed to me now but justly avenged by the wretchedness of my doom. Puffed up with the sudden fashion and luxury of the eminence to which I had been raised; inflated by the compliments and caresses that I received from noble lips and gentle hands; esteeming myself amongst the great ones of the earth, because I fed off silver, and ate of costly wonders out of their season, and drove in coroneted carriages, and looked from the windows of noblemen and gentlemen; conceiving myself, in my fool-

ishness, to be far lifted above the good and gentle companions of my infancy; I had, wickedly and shamefully, thought scorn of their simple and hardy life, and had dreaded lest people should ever know that my first year had been spent beneath the roof of that rosethorn cottage.

Wicked ingratitude, foolish shame!—that now had bitter punishment.

And it was not for the gay rich life in London, but for the innocent forest life in the green pinewood of the Peak, that I yearned with such an agony of longing as I was dragged through the towns and villages of Italy, footsore, bruised, bleeding, worn-out with fatigue, sore all over from blows, devoured by hunger, driven half-mad by thirst, and never hearing any other voices than those that rained their curses on me, or shrieked to me to dance though I were dying.

A year passed with me thus.

It was a hard life enough for Già himself: all such lives are, however romance may colour them, or their vicissitudes make them seem adventurous to the eyes of imaginative youth.

To tramp all weathers on foot, with a heavy box of *fantoccini* strapped to your back; to sleep where you can, in a hayloft or a corn-barn; to walk fifteen miles to a town where, maybe, you do not get as many pence; to play in the scorching heat, under the balconies where the happy people lounge in their pleasant idleness, which seems to insult you with its insolent prosperity of peace;—all this was hard enough, even for him.

But then he had many easy hours withal; welcome at some wayside *trattoria* where trade was dull, and a fritter was tossed, and a stoup of wine poured with eagerness for him; mirth at some rustic bride, where the fun was at its height, and he, though a stranger and a wanderer, was frankly bidden to join; a turn at *morra;* a stroke at *pallone;* a caste of the *boccette;* a game at dominoes when the day was done and the men and maidens were jesting and dancing in some little village under the cork-trees. He had all these things; for he was a man of ready tongue, and comely enough in person. But I had none of these—I starved whilst he ate his stew; I ached with bruises whilst he laughed in the inn-porch; I was the sport and the prisoner of the brutal children whilst he was flinging

his heels in the measures of the dances. I was infinitely miserable; and it seemed to me that my misery would have no end.

In the Eternal City, as in the Campagna, I was but a little, lonely, friendless, miserable suffering thing. To me, therefore, it was horrible.

A victory looks but a sorry thing to the boy conscript lying cramped and bleeding, and crushed and woe-begone in the ambulance wagon on the red evening-tide after the battle. Rome looked but a motley, blinding, cruel, uncanny, eldritch place, full of noise and colour to me, as I lay, aching and terrified and heart-broken on the top of the wooden *fantoccini* box.

I have heard you speak often since then of its sorcery, of its sadness, of its wonderful hues, and its unutterable beauty, and all its mystical, awful charm that none who have once been under its spell can resist; well—I never felt any of these. To me it was only a place where I suffered.

Believe me, it is the light or the darkness of our own fate that either gives 'greenness to the grass and glory to the flower,' or leaves both sickly, wan, and colourless. A little breadth of sunny lawn, the spreading shadow of a single beech, the gentle click of a little garden-gate, the scent of some simple summer roses,—how fair these are in your memory because of a voice which then was on your ear, because of eyes that then gazed in your own! And the grandeur of Nile, and the lustre of the after-glow, and the solemn desolation of Carnac, and the wondrous beauty of the flushed sea of tossing reeds, are all cold, and dead, and valueless, because in those eyes no love now lies for you: because that voice, for you, is now for ever silent.

The narrow, crowded streets; the bray of mules and asses; the eternal wail of the beggars; the stench of stews and fries from the cooking-stalls in the alleys; the overpowering odour from the great mounds of fruit and flowers; the squalor and the glitter, the filth and the beauty; the glimpse through the butchers' doors of a dying kid, or lamb, as it struggled beneath the knife; the shriek of a goose or a fowl, as it was seized from the living flock to have its neck wrung at the market stall:—these were what I saw of Rome;—what I always see now when I think of it.

Moreover, I was harder tasked in the City even than in the Campagna. In the latter there had been but a scant audience at best; two or three performances had always sufficed to gain what coins were to be had in the district. But in Rome there was an audience the whole day long save at the brief noon-hours; and all through the star-lit evenings, till late into the night.

When one crowd had dispersed another gathered. No sooner was the round of tricks finished than it had to be commenced afresh. There was scarce a moment that I was not either dancing, or telling fortunes on the cards, or walking round with my toy tambourine to collect *baiocchi*. Già had no mercy, and the people had no mercy either. It was one perpetual toil, one everlasting misery. At last it so wore me out that I went through the whole programme mechanically, with a noise like the rushing of winds in my ears, and the darkness of a sickly swoon before my eyes. More than once I dropped from sheer exhaustion; and then was roused with a kick and curse.

I think if you knew what you did, even the most thoughtless amongst you would not sanction with your praise and encourage with your coin, the brutality that trains dancing-dogs.

Have human mimes if you will; it is natural to humanity to caper and grimace and act a part; but for pity's sake do not countenance the torture with which Avarice mercilessly trains us 'dumb beasts' for the trade of tricks.

All through those long, sickly, burning days, with their scorching sun streaming on the parched ground, the lash of my task-master kept me at my tread-mill of mimicry. It was as bitter, unbearable, agonising toil to me as any that your galley-slaves suffer is to them. The strain on the muscles and limbs was an intense physical torment; and the incessant nervous apprehension, the terror of ill-usage and blows, were yet more excruciating still.

'The Clown-dog draws throngs to laugh and applaud,' says some advertisement: yes, and I knew a very clever clown-dog once. His feet were blistered with the hot irons on which he had been taught to dance; his teeth had been drawn lest he should use his natural weapons against his cowardly tyrants; his skin beneath his short white hair was black with bruises; though originally of magnificent

courage, his spirit had been so broken by torture that he trembled if a leaf blew against him; and his eyes—well, if the crowds that applauded him had once looked at those patient, wistful, quiet eyes, with their unutterable despair, those crowds would have laughed no more, unless they had indeed been devils.

Who has delivered us unto you to be thus tortured and martyred? Who?—O that awful eternal mystery that ye yourselves cannot explain!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DOG AND THE DEVIL.

After a space Già quitted the city. What he did I know not; but it is certain that he displeased the priestly authorities in some manner, and had to go stealthily and swiftly out of Rome. For I heard many dark ominous words pass between him and his mates, the *pifferari*, and the *pifferari* counselled flight; and he departed thence, all hurriedly, by night, taking me and the box of *fantoccini* with him. From the muttered fragments of talk that I heard, I have a fearful fancy that he had killed some hapless woman in a drunken brawl, and that the woman being a priest's light-of-love, existence on the Seven Hills was no longer safe or even possible for him.

You will always find that these sluggards who are too lazy to labour for themselves, and seek their support by means of some poor performing animal, are great brutes as well as great cowards. Were you wise, you would forbid all such performances; for, if the man who works neither brain nor body be deemed by you useless and of evil example to the community, what then must he be who, in order that he may live in a sot's idleness and indulgence, does daily beat, fatigue, and torture a creature delivered into his power?

Hiding and skulking, and by means, I think, of false papers and names, Già got across to Ostia; and thence went by sea to Marseilles. The horrors of this passage I cannot dwell upon. I was starved, sick, beaten for moan-

ing, and drenched in a deluge of rain that swept the whole Mediterranean with almost the force of a water-spout. Had it not been for the goodness of an old weather-beaten sailor, who wrapped me in a morsel of tarpaulin, and tied me with a rope to the seat, I must have been driven overboard, or have perished of wet and cold, whilst Già below drank brandy and played dominoes with the half-drunk skipper of the rotten, groaning, olive-laden felucca.

There is this that is consolatory in life; its darkest hours rarely have *no* ray of light; its woes, its tyrannies, its agonies, commonly give birth to some act of kindliness, or of courage, or of compassion, that arises in their midst as a palm in the desert; it is little enough oftentimes, but it is something; something that just saves the earth from being hell.

Marseilles lay white and blinding, and scorched with a hard burning sand-laden wind from the African shores, when we at length reached it after a hideous voyage of storm and heat, of hurricane and drouth united, a voyage through which the skill of the old sailor I have named alone brought the vessel, whilst its captain lay drunk in the cabin, and the crew shrieked and roared to the saints.

In Marseilles we tarried some time, and thence passed across France to Paris.

It was the same old miserable life; the same tramping, and playing, and performing.

'O, what a happy little thing art thou!' said one day to me an honest, but rather stupid dog (the only dog ever unwise enough to envy me), who lived in a hut amidst the fields of the great south-west, with a goat-herd. 'Look at me—I fare so hardly, I am out in all weathers, I never taste anything except a bit of black bread or rancid meat, I am all the year round with those silly goats, I never see anything all day but a plover or henharrier flitting by over the marches. How lucky thou!—to ride on the top of that box, and to be tossed sweet cakes and biscuits, and to have nothing at all to do but only to dance for thy living!'

Alas, he little knew the perpetual travail of my existence, and how gladly I would have changed places with him, and taken his black bread and his liberty together!

There is no labour so utterly weary and cruel under the sun as the labour which takes the semblance of pastime. For the dullard is free to go to his solitude, and weep his

heart out, if he will, for the dead whom he laments; but Verdi must write his new opera though the mistress of his youth lies scarce cold in her coffin.

Our passage across France occupied long; going so slowly as we did, pausing at every little hamlet or wayside wine-shop on the road. The people on the whole were more cruel than those of the Campagna; the women were toil-hardened and sun-dried, and had not that frank sweet smile of Rome. There were often fairs, or fêtes, on Saint-days, in the townships through which we went.

These were very quaint and picturesque, I admit; all the colour and the movement; all the gorgeous charlatans and conjurers; all the saints and images and banners; all the white-robed choristers with their censers; all the flower-crowned girls with their crosses; all the chanting priests and singing women; all the green branches, and floating ribbons, and ringing music, chimed in so well with the old grey walls, and the high-peaked roofs, and the straight poplar trees, and the quiet narrow street.

But on such popular days as these I was so maddened with the noise and tumult, I was so worn out with over exertion and pitiless demands on my frail strength, that at length, whenever we drew near the gates of a town, and I saw the gleam of the golden host uplifted, or heard the clamorous *charivari* of the fifes and drums, I trembled and sickened, and strove vainly to escape in any ditch or any hole, and was only dragged within the gates by sheer force, by curses and cuffs, and kicks and blows.

Of course I had no power against my tyrant. I was a little weakly timid thing, and all the natural agility and spirit I possessed were cramped by the garb in which he had imprisoned me, and cowed by the hunger to which he subjected me.

So my life passed: and I had been one year and a half with Già, when at last we drew near to Paris. I dreaded the city beyond all words to tell. I thought that there I should always see the host uplifted, and always hear the shrill din of the *charivari*.

In the country sometimes I had a respite, a breathing space: some woman milking her cattle gave me a drink from the foaming pail; some lad lying deep amongst the hay made me a nest beside him; some gentle cow would

let me rest amongst the fodder of her stall; some big rough-coated dog about a farm would bring me food and call me to his kennel; some young girl, leaning out of her lattice in some hostelry we stopped at, would call to Già not to beat me, and would come down and caress me, and beg me of him for the night, and take me to her little bed under the eaves, and lull me to slumber like an infant against the warmth of her soft bare breast.

But in the cities there were no pause, no pity, no peace, from morn till midnight. The very animals themselves in agony grew selfish, and had but little mercy for their kind, because, for their own dumb helpless lives, men had none.

As we drew near Paris we came to a long steep stony street, uncleanly, unsavoury, full of noise; I heard them say that it was Sèvres. I have ever since shuddered at the name when I have heard it spoken before those pretty porcelain things it christens.

Here there was a crowd; the porcelain makers and painters had finished their work for the day; they were lounging and gossiping and singing, and sipping their coffee inside their house-doors.

Già, as usual, wherever he could command an audience, set his box upright on its pole, opened its case, and began to play, bidding me dance to the music. The puppets never tired, of course; and I suppose he thought that I was like them.

Now as it chanced I had performed all day long in the town of Versailles, hard by. I had scarcely had any rest; and I did not know how to commence afresh. Dancing and performing are as severe a trial to us as the hardest rowing or wrestling is to you; more so, indeed, because you, after all, are only doing that which you choose to do, and which is in a manner natural to you, whilst all these actions which you teach us are to us painful, unnatural, and full of an arduous strain and contortion, for which our nerves and muscles are utterly unfitted.

The puppets danced gaily, as the organ handle turned; I moved to and fro, as I had been taught, on my hind legs; I smoked my little pipe; I struck my tiny tambourine that was hung round my neck; I did all to the best that I could, and the youths, and the young girls, and the children, and the sturdy tanners of Billancourt and the wan pottery

painters of Sèvres applauded gleefully and shrieked, 'Encore, la Pipetta!—encore, encore!' so that I had to go again and again through all my antics, and yet they were not satisfied.

Now, I had been performing all day long since sunrise; I had eaten nothing but the handful of boiled rice he had tossed to me. I was very sick, and tired, and worn out; and it so came to pass that, when in obedience to the 'encore, encore' of the impatient and delighted little crowd, Già shouted to me the word of command to commence afresh, I tried to dance again, but—my strength failing—tottered, and moaned, and fell, breaking in twain my little painted tambourine.

I lay, stupefied and sick, in the white dust. Già furious, threw himself on me, and seized me by the neck, and beat me;—ah! I can feel the rain of the blows now.

'I will teach thee to tire! I will teach thee to fall!' he screamed aloud, and with every word the biting lash curled round my little quivering body.

'Beast! would you kill the dog?' cried one of the porcelain makers, though he did not stir to succour me.

'It is mine!' cried Già, a coward though a brute. 'It is mine, I will kill it surely;—the little sluggish devil!'

Scarcely were the words uttered, when suddenly a ponderous body flung itself on my tormentor; a row of white and glistening teeth seized and shook him with tremendous force; he dropped me with a shriek of terror; and my deliverer, in whom I recognised one of the princes of my own kind, caught me up in those massive fangs which had wrought my freedom, and bounded off with me in a stretching gallop.

The pressure of his jaws; the speed of his going; the heat; the bruises; the terror; all combined, made me insensible: this manner of deliverance was well-nigh as fearful as the torture itself had been: and I knew not where I was carried nor how long I remained unconscious.

When I recovered my senses, I was lying on long grass beneath the trees of a garden: and over me stood my friend—a gigantic tawny-coloured Muscovite dog. Huge though he was, and with the grip and the claws of a lion, his eyes were soft and even tender, and gleamed very gently and benevolently on me from under the leonine waves of his shaggy mane.

He addressed me in that universal tongue of ours which is one of the many superiorities which we enjoy over men: —you, poor humanities, born on different banks of a river, or opposite sides of a plain, jabber jargons mutually unintelligible to each other, and on a public mart, or at a *tir national*, stand bewildered amidst a score of unknown tongues spoken by your next-door neighbour. But place a Labrador dog with a Pyrenean dog, let one of Poland meet one of Peru, and lo! you behold them intelligible to one another at once, able to exchange converse by a free-masonry to which the widest-spread of your brotherhood is as naught. For our race being too wise ever to build either a Babel or a Babylon, no curse of confusion rests on us, and though scattered all over the world, we are yet even as one great nation.

'I am Russ,' said my deliverer. We always give our names frankly to each other; that base human device, an *alias*, is wholly unknown amongst us. 'I am Russ. I will not hurt you; you know that. We are far away from that brute, your taskmaster. No man can emulate my speed. I have raced even with rein-deer; and have beaten them. You poor little frightened thing!—he would have killed you if I had not interfered. Are you a dancing-dog?'

I groaned an assent: I was ashamed of my profession, and of my little red jacket, and of the broken tambourine about my neck.

'Ah, that is so like a man!' said the giant Russ grimly. 'To case your little supple body in a tight bit of cloth, and to force you to strut awkwardly about on two legs, and to then call that sort of disfigurement "training" you. Well —I am glad that I saw you. I fly at all such creatures as Già. Wretched, lazy, lubberly ruffians, who are too idle to labour for their living, and torture a bear, or an ape, or a goat, or a puppy like you, to get the coins that they want for their food and their drink! I have had a tussle ere now with this Già. Too idle a sot to work for himself, he is for ever pressing some innocent thing into his service, that he beats, and starves, and drives mad for his profit.'

I shuddered with the remembrance of my sufferings as he spoke; and with the pain of the bruises that covered every inch of my body.

'You are very good,' I faltered, 'But how can you keep me from him?'

'Why, see here. I will get you permission to stay in this place. You need not go out of the garden walls; and Già will never dare to track *me*. Ask every one in Paris who Russ is and what he can do. If you feel well enough now, come within.'

He stalked like a lion towards a low white stone building; and I feebly followed him, still wondering, dazed, and affrighted. My limbs ached, and my coat impeded my movements; but I managed to crawl after him meekly and feebly, through some winding grassy paths, all yellow with golden dandelions and shadowed with hanging boughs. At last we approached the low stone house; with a thatched roof on which pigeons sat pluming themselves, an old carved oak porch half smothered in that white creeper you call traveller's joy, and some deep stone-embayed windows hidden likewise in ivy and creeping roses. Amongst all this verdure and blossom, there hung, half seen, a wooden board on which glistened a couchant silver stag.

Russ crossed the threshold and mounted some broad wooden stairs, so black with age and slippery with polish that I had much ado to climb them after him. On the head of the stair-case he pushed open an unlatched door, thrust himself through it, and advanced into the chamber.

It was broad and low, with casements looking out on sunny meadows; it was filled with what to me seemed lumber, quaint shapes and devices, shabby draperies, and strange wooden skeletons that filled me with terror. At what I afterwards knew was an easel, stood a young man painting; at a little distance sat a girl in a blue-serge gown, and with a white peaked cap.

It was to the woman that Russ advanced; taking me in his mouth, and laying me at her feet; then retreating a little, he gazed at her with eyes of wistful entreaty, thumping his bushy tail weightily on the floor.

The young painter laughed.

'Another protégée, Russ? Verily thou art the most benevolent of all four-footed Christians!'

It was a misnomer. We have ever been pantheists; pagans, if you will. Had the dogs of Jerusalem been Christians, be sure that Pilate would have been torn limb from limb, and Peter with the lie upon his lips been bayed from out the hall of judgment. Where one dog lives and loves, there at least is one friend faithful.

However, the speaker meant well, I doubt not; and Russ, understanding him, leapt on him in gratitude, knowing that he had obtained asylum for my helplessness.

'Poor little thing! How thin it is, and how frightened!' said the young woman, who stooped over me and touched me gently. 'This is the fifth dancing dog that Russ has brought to me!'

Russ thumped his tail in confirmation.

'The fifth! Where are they, then?' the artist asked.

'O, I have placed them out; people around took them; they are happy,' the girl answered him, smiling and freeing me from my coat. 'Ah, forgive me, Monsieur Carlos, I forgot that I was sitting; I have disarranged the pose!'

The painter looked down on her tenderly.

'No matter! The sun is low. We will put the canvas aside till to-morrow. Then I will paint you with the sick dog in your lap; that soft pity becomes you so well!'

She smiled again, and a bright warmth came over the cool clear olive of her cheek; then she rose and bore me from the chamber, followed by Russ. In a few moments I was lying on some hay in a corner of a fragrant smelling loft, and being fed with fresh milk and bread, whilst Russ surveyed the operation with a good-natured and self-approving air.

'That woman is an angel,' he said to me as she passed out, leaving me cleansed, comforted, and refreshed.

'Who is she?' I asked feebly.

'Our Madelon,' he returned, as though all were uttered therein. 'I have lived with her ever since she was fifteen. She is twenty-two now. Philip Ferrand left me here when I was young. He never paid them, either, for his six months' board and lodging. I have heard painters say since then that he has risen to great eminence in England. Well, if he have, he has never thought of either his dog or his debts. The old Mère Bris, too, here nursed him through a dangerous illness; and not so much as a kerchief for her throat has Philip ever sent her in payment.'

'But they have been good to you?'

'Good! Indeed they have. I was never happy with him. He would swear at me, and, what was worse, sneer at me. You know a dog would sooner be kicked than be laughed at. Here I have been happy all my days. It is

such a still, quiet, pleasant place; and one does as one likes. Sometimes I go out for a long ramble; when I do, I am sure to meet some animal in distress, and I rescue him, if I can, and bring him to Madelon.'

'That is very noble of you.'

'O dear, no! It is just commonly right. Life would get too smooth and too sleepy here if I did not go out sometimes, and have a fight and a tussle over some bit of evil-doing. For what else was I made so big and so strong? Do you know what they say in my country?'

'No. In Russia?'

'In Russia. They don't let dogs enter churches, because they say that a dog once betrayed Noah to the devil for the sake of getting that thick warm coat which we northern dogs now all wear. Now, that is a lie. It just shows the way men distort things. Amongst our traditions, which of course men can know nothing about, is one on that very point; and it runs thus, having nothing to do with Noah:

'In the very early age of the world there was a dog, very wise and brave, and who hated a lie most of all the sins under the sun.

'Now, this dog one day came to a church, where a preacher was being listened to as though he were an angel from heaven. The dog knew better, and sprang on him, and tore off his robes, and showed a cloven hoof and a tail beneath them. "Foolish people!" cried the dog, "your priest is the devil of Falsehood;" and he drove the devil out of the sanctuary.

'He went to a second church, and found the priest the devil of Greed, and drove him out the same.

'He went to a third, and there exposed the devil of Lust; and to a fourth, and there unmasked the devil of Self-love; and to a fifth, and there sprang upon the devil of Empty-words; and the people all stood aloof and wondering, and cried, "Eh, then! are our priests all devils?"

'But the devils themselves were sorely frightened, and said, "If the dog tear off all lies, then the trade of devils and priests will be gone?" So they banded themselves together, and persuaded the foolish people that the dog was a wizard, and must be killed for the weal of the world. And in the end, the wicked people stoned the dog to death; and he died because he had dared to witness the

truth, and had not left those fools alone to their worship of falsehoods.

'And from that day, devils still having great influence and, above all, being strong in all pulpits, whence they throw dust in the eyes of the multitude, they have always hated all dogs, and have forbad them out of their churches.* This is the true tradition. The other fable is a devil's device.'

I thanked him for his instruction, but being still faint and weary, longed in my soul to be quiet and sleep. Besides, when you have just been in the grip of a cruel man, it seems to you that the devils themselves can hardly be very much worse to deal with, and you hardly feel that proper abhorrence of them which you would do at any other time.

Returning to present matters, I asked him who was that youth whom I had seen in the painting-chamber.

'O, an artist!' answered Russ, with a little good-natured contempt. 'All the men who come to this place are artists. That one has been here since the first days of March. By name he is Carlos Merle. He is of very great genius certainly; but I am not sure of him for all that. He is fitful. He works with great spurts, and then does nothing for days, except lie on the grass and dream, or murmur to Madelon. Genius is a great thing, of course! but it is not everything. Genius is like a spirit flame; but genius must have its armour of application, as the flame must have its lamp-shade, or both will go out under a blast of rough wind.'

'What was he doing when I saw them?'

'Painting her portrait. All of them like to do that. It occupied Jean Stenlinck six weeks last year to get the portraits of a brown pipkin and a market-cabbage; and Jean still is mad with himself because the pipkin won't look old enough, and the cabbage will look too green on his canvas, do what he will to alter them. Ah, the ecstasies I have heard him go into over a well-painted wooden pail, or a pinch of snuff in a paper! They see nought to adore in real pails and papers of snuff, then how can the mere imitation of the thing have any worth?'

* Except in Scotland; where I suppose that the people's gratitude to their Colley-dogs is too strong for Satan to quench it.—ED.

I was too tired and ill to take any interest in his disquisition. Since that time I have heard plenty of art-jargon talked by half the connoisseurs of Europe; but I am not sure that I ever heard anything more direct to the point, or more truly sensible, than this objection from Russ. But Russ is not the world; and meantime Meissonniers fetch the same prices as Raphaels.

'I like artists,' continued my instructor, laying his massive form down to rest. 'They are stupid, you know. They will stare for hours at a ripple of water, or a few twisted twigs, and they always talk as if heaven and earth depended on their hogs' bristles and their oil-tubes. But they are a kindly, simple, genial race as a rule. They are so ignorant, and know nothing about a bird except the hue of its feathers, and nothing about a dog except the tint of his coat, and nothing about a woman except the red in her lips and the white in her limbs, going altogether by the surface of things and fancying they have got "atmosphere" in dabs of grey and yellow, and "distance" in streaks of flake-white, and "sunset" in scumbled lakes and ochres. Yet they are very happy in that innocent blissful stupidity of theirs, and, like all happy people, are good-natured. Of course no dog was ever so ridiculous as to draw an imitation dog, and take pleasure in the canvas creature that could not bark, or move, or smell, or feel. But then so many of men's pursuits do look so trivial to us that I scarcely think Art, as they call it, is much worse than anything else. And it hurts nothing, which is more than can be said of the generality of their pastimes.'

'You do not think well of men?'

'O yes, well enough,' said Russ carelessly, as a giant will speak of pigmies. 'There are only two animals in all creation that I hate, and they are a cat and a woman.'

'You think these two alike, then?'

'Alike' My dear little soul, they are one and the same! When cats die, they become women. Did you never know that? Look at their pretty little teeth, their velvet skins, their agile grace, their idolatry of warmth, and ease, and good living; their chilly sensualism; their frolics, that always end in a scratch to their playmate; their passion for chasing a mouse or a lover, that, once caught and slain, is valueless vermin for evermore in their sight. The cats

keep all their characteristics when they turn into women. We become men, it is said, though I doubt it myself; for it would be hard to descend in the scale of creation. But dogs who believe this affirm that our singular antagonism to cats is instinctive, as against our future betrayers in our future state of existence. The dog that kills a cat will, it is said by our poodle-pundits, meet that cat as a woman when he is a man, and will marry her. There seems no justice in so terrible a punishment; but if true, it serves to explain the "cat and dog life" of most marriages.'

And with that Russ, fatigued by his long gallop through the heat of the noon, composed himself to sleep; and slept with fits and starts, and mutterings and growls, caused, he afterwards told me, by a dream which he had of a tortoise-shell cat, whom he had once slain in the days of his youth, incited thereto by his master, and who appeared to him in his slumber, with prophecies of her vengeance.

I, overpowered with pain, joy, fear, and fatigue, all commingled, slept also, and forgot in slumber all my bruises, my woes, and my exile.

Ah, when I awoke, how delightful it was! No coat imprisoning my limbs, no stick shaken in my eyes, no kick thrust into my ribs, no curse hurled at my defenceless weakness! It was all calm, and still, and sweet. The bright summer sun-light came streaming in; the apple-boughs, fruit-laden, swayed against the windows, the cocks crew near at hand, the sheep bleated afar, the pleasant scents of fruits and of blossoms and of herbs blew in upon the south-west wind; and I rejoiced in all this freedom, peace, and loveliness, with that gratitude which is a dog's religion.

Why have you not more of it in yours?

The Romans, I have heard tell, veiled their faces in prayer: that was fear. The Greeks stood, with eyes fastened on the earth: that was meditation. The Christians kneel: that is entreaty. There were but the poor Peruvians, who bowed low, lifting their eyes to heaven, and showering kisses in the air: that was rejoicing, thankfulness, and adoration, all in one.

And you think you are holier than they were?

Well, think so if you like.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SILVER STAG.

It was a tranquil fragrant place, this little hostelry of the Silver Stag. It was quite old, and very rustic, though yet so near to Paris.

Its gardens were famous for their peaches, and its hives for their honey. It was a drowsy, shady, odorous place, full of the murmurs of birds, and of bees, and of ever-tremulous leaves. Untrained roses bloomed in every nook and corner, and pigeons and doves by the hundred flew all day in and out of a great square stone dove-cot, that had been built in the years of the Dame de Beauté. For human life about it there were only the cheery old woman, Manon Bris, her daughter Madelon, and the painter Carlos Merle.

Their house was much frequented by artists, who came thither for sake of economy, fresh air, solitude, and the beauty of the woods; men could live there for a few francs a week, enjoy all the stillness of the country, watch all the charm of woodland life, and yet withal be in Paris in less than an hour. The place was indeed consecrated to artists, and few others ever intruded there, unless it were some gay group of students and grisettes on a Sunday, after a childish frolic in the wood, and some wild rounds of games and dances under the orchard-trees. All the week it was very still, still as death, except for the fluttering of the doves, and the singing of the birds, and the turning of the water-wheel, and now and then the bay of Russ.

For old Manon Bris, being well off, and her daughter well dowered, and being, moreover, an honest, fearless, pure-living old woman, cared not if she displeased her patrons; and set her face straight against all those Greek-limbed models and Egyptian-eyed companions whom the painters would fain have brought thither; and she would have none of them—no, not if it were ever so—and made her will felt on her guests, who laughed indeed, but yet obeyed, and came there only with male comrades.

It is needless to say what a paradise this place was to me—a poor little terrified, agonised, hunted creature, who for

a year and a half had only known blows, and kicks, and hunger, and thirst, and suffering. They let me dream or doze all my hours away; play at will in the sweet unshaven grasses; roll the fallen apples about as balls, and roam from dawn to twilight in the deep old leafy ways of the fragrant-scented garden.

It seemed to me happiness exquisite enough only to stretch my limbs in peace on the cool moss; only to pass the whole blithe day without one voice raised in anger at me; only just to be fed, and to be clean, and to be left quite free. The passion for freedom is intense in dogs. Men do not much mind the gall of fetters, if so be that those fetters are well gilded. But the gilt on a chain makes it none the better to us; and we pine, and fret, and thirst for liberty, with a force you can never know—you, who so continually sell yourselves into bondage for the sake of the purchase-price.

Moreover, there was one person very good to me—ever gentle, ever thoughtful, ever kind. This was Madelon Bris.

She had not very much beauty, this Madelon; not at least after the vivid colouring and the exuberant outline of Avice Dare, who had the scarlet bloom on her cheeks and the northern gold in her hair. She was very slender, and very pale, with great dark changing eyes, and swift small feet, and a mouth which, though somewhat large, yet had a smile so sweet that it had loveliness.

In every iota she was so unlike to what Avice had been in the old Peak days, that the contrast was almost startling to me. She was so skilled at every sort of work; so rapid and lithe in every kind of movement; she seemed so perpetually content; she sang so constantly over her labour, indoor or out.

She knew every fowl by name; she would twist the humblest grasses and flowers into such pretty forms; she did all household things with so neat yet so elegant a touch; she dressed so simply, yet with so much grace and suitability for the work she did; with never any ornament save only one plain and massive cross of gold hung on a string of ivory beads. Everything about her was in harmony, and her life 'seemed set to music,' though it was a life of continual industry, and of even prosaic cares.

Her mother was very old, and did little save sit in the sun and read her well-worn book of Hours. All the toil and the thought of the place fell upon Madelon; and there were no boards so white, no brazen pans so shining, no pottery so clean, no honey so clear, no poultry so plump, no plants so healthful, no omelettes so lightly tossed, no bed so sweetly-lavender-scented, as those of the Silver Stag.

This life of hers was prose, even as had been Avice's; but there was a poetry in it.

It was not heavy-weighted with tawdry follies; it was not fevered with discontent; it was not disfigured by an everlasting straining after something unpossessed; it was not hideous with the dead incurable poverty of spirit, and abject slavery to the dominion of ignorance, that are so appallingly hopeless in the lives of your English poor.

Avice had wreathed huge glass beads on her throat, red and yellow and blue; Madelon never wore but the ivory necklace that had been her great-great-grandmother's. Avice had worn a gown of many colours, and of as many rags; Madelon wore one of dark-blue serge, but whole and deftly shaped. Avice, gathering radishes for the dinner-table, had thrown them all together, wet and soiled with the clods of their native earth; Madelon washed them heedfully, set them in little dainty pyramids of red and white, and garnished the whole with blossoming thyme. Avice at her work had kept her mouth sullenly tight set; Madelon at her work sung like some blithe bird. In Avice poverty had been dire ugliness and sulky wrath; in Madelon poverty was smiling patience and thoughtful content.

But there is no need to amplify examples; the one was Gallic and the other British.

Life went very softly and happily at the Silver Stag: old Manon Bris was a cheery old soul, with a stock of quaint legendary lore from her native province and a mirthful temper combined with a sturdy will. There was no one at the house that summer save Carlos Merle, and he lived almost like their son and brother. He was a man of seven or eight-and-twenty, Bohemian, enthusiast, and artist; he had few friends and little gold, but in compensation he had a most singular personal beauty and as singular a genius for art.

I have never in my life seen a man more beautiful than Carlos; he was like some perfect classic statue, and was radiantly fair with golden locks, though the country of his birth was far away south, touching the Pyrenees. They did not know very much about him; but from what he had said it had transpired that his mother had been a woman of noble family, who had contracted a low marriage with an opera-singer. Both were dead now, leaving him their beauty, their artistic dreams, and their poverty.

It was easy to see that there was more than friendship betwixt Madelon and her guest. She was reserved with him; and as shy as the natural dignity about her, and her clear and candid nature, permitted: but he never addressed her without the blood tinging her pale cheek, and he never entered her presence without her deep dark eyes kindling with a richer glow. As for the young man, he seemed irresistibly drawn to the peace and purity of this character so opposite to his own; he watched her swift yet soft movements as she went about her household labour, *ohne hast, ohne rast*, with the same pleasure that he watched the graceful flight of a dove; he appealed to her continually for her opinion of his art, and listened to her with loving reverence. For Madelon, though by no means what you term an educated woman, was of that natural intelligence which to a great extent supplies education by observation, and had heard and seen so much of art from her childhood, that her power of criticism was considerable when her modesty allowed her to give judgment.

She had a strong influence over Carlos Merle: when he, with his native southern indolence, would lie all through the long sunny hours under the acacia shadows, dreaming of many pictures but executing none, she would approach him gently and murmur: 'Dreams are the artist's heaven; but they are not the highway to fame, my friend.' And he, roused by that hint, would then rise, and shake himself, and go within, to work at his great picture for the Salon, or bring his tools into the open air, and sketch all manner of living things and floral life around him.

'They love one another,' I said to Russ, when I had been there a week or two.

'I suppose they do,' he answered reluctantly. 'But I hardly approve of it. There have been many better men here than Carlos; and she has never cared for them.'

'What is amiss with Carlos?' I asked; for indeed I liked the young man myself; he was gentle of nature, and often played with me.

'There is this amiss,' said shrewd Russ. 'He is the weaker of the two. Not in talent; he has superb talent; but in character. And there is always woe in such cases.'

'May she not strengthen him? inspire him?'

'Where did you catch up that human cant? Do not believe that women ever do that. When a man is strong, but has fallen, a great-minded woman may raise him to her height, to above her height; if she only move him with passion enough. But where a man is radically weak it is not in any woman to do it. A mistress may, perhaps, because the tenure of a mistress is always uncertain, which piques and spurs him to retain her; but a wife never will. Her attraction falls away into habit; and her spell dissolves in familiarity.'

'But look what influence Madelon has over this painter already.'

'Ah—yes. Because he is a little in love with her; and is under the first charm of her sweet modest worth, her lofty pure wisdom. But if he were to marry her these would soon grow only wearisome to him, if only by reason of their superiority to himself; and he would be sure to forsake them for sake of some warmer, fuller, and more merely sensual charm. Madelon is an angel to those who have studied her nature; but she is only a quiet good girl of the people to others, and she cannot, you know, be called beautiful.'

'Are only beautiful women beloved then?'

'O yes! I have seen men mad for a woman who had scarcely a good feature in her face; but then she had a *diable au corps* that supplied the place of beauty and seduced them.'

'A *diable au corps?*'

'*Au corps, et à l'esprit, et à l'âme*! A woman who was once a cat, my dear: which Madelon never can have been.'

I said nothing; though I wondered greatly why a woman was likely to be less beloved because she was an angel, than if she had been a cat; and I wondered also why *diable au corps* should be such a great attraction.

I do not wonder now: nor will you either, if you have

studied the sex, and know all that Russ meant by the three little words.

However, despite the chill that he threw on it, I continued to weave my little romance in those pleasant summer days, under the great blossoming lilacs and lindens of the place of my refuge; and I think that Madelon and Carlos Merle wove theirs too.

She was seldom alone with him, for the white tower of Mère Manon's head-gear was ever in sight, in the same chamber or through some open door. But continually when she was out among the flowers, or the poultry, or the beehives, tying up the sweet-scented stocks, or gathering the rose-leaves to dry for *pot-pourri*, or calling the pigeons around for food, Carlos would come down from his painting attic, and saunter forth likewise, and stand beside her in his picturesque linen blouse, with the sun on his handsome golden head, smoking, and smiling, and sometimes tendering a nominal help.

And at such times he would talk tenderly to her, wistfully and sadly too, for he was alone in the world, and poor, and very ambitious; and Madelon would let the rose-leaves roll down on the turf again, or the grain all tumble in a heap at her feet, whilst she listened with tears that did not fall just gleaming in her great soft eyes;—the tears of a yearning sympathy which was, though she scarcely knew it, love.

At such times, also, Russ would growl, where he was stretched full length under the trees.

'There have been many better men here than he,' he would grumble in my ear; 'and she never hearkened to one of them like that. O, he is well enough; I do not say anything against him; but he is of the stuff, look you, to make a great name by his genius one hour, and kill himself for a courtesan the next.'

I, with the obstinacy of youth, disbelieved his verdict, and thought much better things of this sunny-haired southerner.

I lived a good deal in Carlos' *atelier;* in rainy days I was there entirely; and I think that I got to understand him better than stout old Russ, with his preconceived conclusions, ever did. Experience is an excellent spy-glass; but it has this drawback, that prejudice very often clouds the lens.

Carlos, with all his beauty and talent, and mingled force

and indolence, had had but a rough life; and had been sorely tossed and evilly entreated, and had suffered much from poverty and other ills.

This place in its peace and poetry was much such a haven to him as to me; its calm idyllic days were sweet to him as to myself; life here, under these blossoming limes, these clouds of foliage and flowers, seemed so still and fair a thing, so fit for dreams, so free of pain.

There are pauses in all your lives in which a balmy rest comes unto you, and you say, 'It is well with me; I will look neither at the years that lie behind me nor before.' It was such a pause in this young painter's. In such a season a young man's 'fancies lightly turn to thoughts of love'—love for any woman near to him; any woman youthful enough to have in her the likeness of an ideal, and fair enough to seem to him the source whence his peace comes. Madelon was both these, and she was more. She was a woman who won his reverence by her pure straight thoughts, free of all guile; who charmed his eye with the grave grace and the lithe ease of her movements; and who made that poverty, which so long had been the King of Terrors to him, wear an aspect of sweet serene simplicity, which appeared of higher worth than riches.

He loved her therefore; loved her truthfully; if in such a season of summer and of rest he would have thus loved equally any mindless, laughing, red-lipped girl, or any dark-browed, lustrous-eyed faithless wanton, who should have been beside him in that soft maturity of the full year.

The influence Madelon had on him was very genuine, if not destined to be very enduring. She seldom advised; she never preached; she was disposed rather to undervalue her own powers of judgment, than to exalt them. But the very sight of her, in the untiring industry of her simple life, was of itself a tonic to the indolence of genius; and beneath her honest humility there was a force of enthusiasm for all high purpose and achievement, that acted as a fulcrum to the too facile talents of her guest.

What he felt towards her it was plain to see; her own feelings were deeper hid, and less easy to guess. But that his presence was welcome to her, and his success dear, there could be little doubt; and her sincere belief in the greatness of his future was in itself enough to stimulate a man

of spirit and of sensitiveness towards the realization of its inspiring prophecies.

So the summer sped sweetly away with us all; the passing of time scarcely noticed except by the change of apple-buds to fruit, and the appearance and disappearance of the ruddy gold-starred strawberries underneath their leaves.

Two other artists passed part of the season there, but they were two aged men, severally painters of landscape and of animals; and their presence in no way jarred upon the harmony. Indeed, in a manner they contributed to it, for they had both fame and influence in the world of art, and they also saw great things in the works of Carlos Merle, and bade him be sure of that ultimate victory over the world, of which he often despaired: the ten years in which he had studied art having been a decade of failure, neglect, and privation.

With fresh heart put into him, the young man laboured hard during those long, clear, midsummer days; taking his recompense in the cool of the dewy evenings, with the great stars shining out, and the nightingales singing in the orchard, whilst Madelon, sitting in the porch, let her work fall upon her knee, and listened to him as he murmured passages of the *Nuits d'Octobre*, or of the *Chants du Crépuscule*, their melancholy and fervid poetry seeming, indeed, to be the very voices of the night.

I did not share Russ's contempt for Art. To me it always appeared a marvellous sorcery this, through which, by means of pigments and of oils, all things of nature were made to have their being on a dull, dead piece of pine-wood or of paper. I have moaned at the misery of Landseer's 'St. Giles;' I have barked furiously at the hunting scenes of Snyders; I have howled with grief before the 'Dead Trumpeter's dog' at Avignon; I have longed for old Trust to see the sheep of Bonheur and of Verbœckhoven; I have thirsted to pull the meat out of the basket of that bloated 'Jack in Office;'—therefore there cannot be a doubt but that I have the true feeling for art in me. For this lies, I humbly submit, not half so much in the sharpness of criticism, as it does in the credence of sympathy.

Hence I watched with interest the progress of the great picture with which Carlos was about to challenge the verdict of Paris in the Winter exhibition of the Salon.

It was a very peculiar picture; in a style that is not popular in these days, when you are fond of little cabinet sketches of every-day life, and of a realism that faithfully reproduces every rent in a worn carpet, every knot in a carpenter's piece of deal.

This picture of Carlos' was gorgeous in hue, shadowy in meaning, had but little detail, and was of a terrible force and a passionate poetry. And yet the subject was very simple. It was only a man lying dead in a hot glow of sunset, with a wondrous fair face, and a fearful woe set upon it; self-slain it was easy to tell: and away from him, looking back over her shoulder, was stealing through the hush and the heat, with the light of the west all about her like a fire, a woman, with a wicked laugh upon her mouth, and her bosom all bare, and her hand gathering up rich disordered gold-broidered robes. This strange work, which had no story, was called simply 'Faustine,' and it spoke for itself.

It was of this subject and its treatment that the painters who came and went that summer at the Silver Stag predicted such great things.

There was a little one, a highly-finished study also, which he intended to send with it, for sake of the contrast, as I suppose. This was quite a small picture of a woman sitting in cool, grey, silver-toned light, that came in through an ivy-hung lattice; her work, a common shirt of serge, had fallen on her lap, and her eyes were lifted to the soft night sky without, where the first stars were gleaming. The subject was of the slightest and simplest; but the colour, the patience, the tender poetry in this moonlit face, made it beautiful. It was on this that he had been engaged when Russ told me that he was painting the portrait of Madelon Bris.

'Send them both,' said one of the aged artists to him. 'They show that you can feel and fathom the two extreme opposites of woman's nature, Without being able to do this, neither painter nor poet can be great.'

Doubtless the old man was right.

But how many of you men write, think, paint, and speak as thought there were but one of these two sides to womanhood—according as the brazen, or the silvern, round of the shield has been turned to you.

It was into autumn when those two paintings were altogether completed. Madelon looked at the one which so much resembled her, of which she had indeed been alike the theme and the inspiration, with a shy sweet pleasure, that blushed a little in her pale cheek, and spoke eloquently in her dark eyes. But before the Faustine she stood far longer, lost in thought; gazing at it with an intensity, a wistful wonder, a fascinated horror—even as a woman may gaze at a rival who, though steeped in sin, is yet through sin victorious.

It was in the hush of an October evening that she stood looking at it thus for the hundredth time, his latest touch having been put to it; making more wicked the laugh of the courtesan, more lurid the sunset glow, more glittering her robes of cloth of gold, more white and rigid the face of the dead man.

The evening was very warm. The leaves of the creepers around the wide lattice were tinged with amber and crimson; the sun was burning in the west; the great golden pears hung motionless amongst their still green leaves; the fragrance of ripened fruit, and of damp earth, and of late roses came in on the western wind.

'The large wooden chamber was half in shadow, half in light; the only sound upon the silence was the lowing of the cattle in the distant fields, and the coo of the doves ere they settle to rest. All was cool, and still, and balmy.

Carlos approached her when she stood in front of the Faustine.

'Why will you look so much at that picture?' he said gently. 'Why not look rather at the other, which is like yourself?'

Madelon did not answer for some moments, and I thought a faint shudder came over her.

'It has the fascination of the unknown for me,' she answered simply.

'The unknown, indeed! But that is not all?'

'Not quite all. I am trying to see wherein lies that woman's power—that terrible power which has ended in stretching him there—dead.'

'You cannot. No woman can see it—unless she be like that woman herself.'

'Are you sure of that? I am not.'

'Why? You say it is the sorcery of the unknown. In saying that you have said you cannot comprehend it.'

'I ought to have said rather the unfamiliar. It cannot be unknown to me, since I feel it. It hurts me; it oppresses me; it is an awful thing—that witchery of sin, that has such irresistible seduction for all men!'

And whilst she spoke she still gazed with the same peculiar intensity of regard into the wicked eyes of the Faustine, till it seemed as though she read a living mind, a living vice, a living lie, in that pictured semblance of a gold-decked crime.

Carlos, in answer, moved the other picture before her.

'Nay,' he said softly, 'if Faustine triumph over some, others are saved—saved by such pure eyes as those that win them to their higher dreams,—to duty, peace, and honour. For a season Faustine may allure; but the gold on her garments is bought by blood, and the cruel hot sun of passion kills. Men seek to rest for their lifetime in the holy light of those calm stars.'

Madelon smiled: the smile of a woman who believes, and for whom belief is beatitude. Yet the smile died soon upon her face, and she looked not at the woman who sat dreaming in the starlight, but still on the wicked eyes of the Faustine.

'It may be so,' she said, under her breath; 'but your pencil was closer to truth than your words. Look!—he—lies dead; and she—she sits there by the lattice *alone*.'

Then she passed swiftly from the painting chamber, as though fearful that her answer bore some interpretation that she could ill endure to hear him give; some self-betrayal which for one brief moment had escaped her.

Alone! Carlos echoed the word as he stood before the little portrait, which caught the fading light of the west upon it. The word seemed to strike heavily on his ear; dully upon his heart, as with the melancholy of a foreboding.

This little slender, simple study had more sadness in it than he had ever noted whilst occupied in creating it. The weary folding of the hands, the meditation of the uplifted eyes, the thoughtful shadowy smile upon the mouth, the faint grey light that seemed to float around the form;—all were sad with the infinite sadness of resignation, the sadness of a woman alone with her perished youth;—alone for evermore.

The face was the face of Madelon; but on it was a grief, around it was a solitude, that were as yet far from her; that as yet had never even touched her cheerful tranquil life.

'It is Faustine, who dies alone!' he muttered, as though he repelled the thought her words had conjured up. 'Not such women as Madelon. They die in the ripeness of time, after a life of peace, with their children and their grandchildren about them.'

He went to the open window and leaned his arms on it, and looked down on the garden below. He was very thoughtful and touched, I thought with a reflex of Madelon's sadness.

I wondered if he had ever been beneath the sorcery of such as that Faustine whom he had painted there; or, whether it were only by some foreboding of a fate to come that he had dreamed that dark and awful story, and wrought it out with colour till it seemed the record of a fact.

I could not but fancy it the last.

The fair face of this young painter was very frank, and tender, and eager; it had sorrow and unrest, and desire upon it, but these were all untainted by evil: it had rather the longing for a fuller life in it than the fatigue of one by whom the uttermost possibilities of life have been exhausted.

Perhaps I hardly reasoned thus, then; but I felt it: and now, looking back to that time through the light of my experience, I am certain that I translated aright the look upon his features.

As he leaned on the wooden window-sill, in the still green garden beneath, where the moonlight already was stealing, he saw Madelon. She was walking amidst her flowers, that grew half wild amidst the grass and bushes. Now and then she stooped and raised some fallen carnation, or lifted some rose, which, overladen with dew, drooped downward and trembled, as a human heart that is too happy sinks and trembles with apprehension.

Now and then, too, she moved aside, that her foot should not crush some tiny crawling thing, that had its one short hour of harmless joy amongst the leaves and grasses: now and then she lifted some little brown glow-worm, with its brightly burning lamp, up to some place of safety, on a leafy bough, or in the cup of a late lily: nay, even a beetle creeping with its load homeward, or even a sand-worm

crawling in the gravelled way, she stepped aside from leaving them their life.

Would that more amongst you had that tender pity; had that reverence for the wonder of existence which is as great in the tiniest fly that wings its way as in the great leviathan of the sea. All things must suffer, and must think, since all things dread and trust: can there be fear without mental torture? Can there be trust without emotional power? Ay—and thrusting a pin through the beetle's body and cutting the brain from the living pigeon, in your hideous dissecting rooms, will not teach you this; it will only teach you to be blind to it.

The young man leaning from the casement, hidden himself amongst the thick screen of the ivy, watched her as she moved. Perhaps that gentle compassion for the 'lowliest thing that lived' had greater sweetness in his sight because, to him, the world of men had been cruel and hard; and the world of women had had for him some scorn, since he had not owned the gold that buys their kisses.

When the stones of poverty and of disdain are rained from many hands upon one single head, he on whom they fall—being defenceless—grows one of two things beneath the storm: either he becomes case-hardened and ruthless in revenge or he grows weak as water, and is ready to sell his soul for the sweet balm of pity. To Carlos Merle—with the heart of a woman in his god-like young form—pity and comprehension bore so fair a likeness to love that, paying them with gratitude, he dreamed gratitude was also love. This error is common with you all; commonest with the tenderest of your natures: but it is an error which often costs you more heavily than sin itself. For, amongst you men and women, though there be absolute passion without love, there is no absolute love without passion.

He watched her thus awhile, where she went amongst the trees, with the dark graceful folds of her dress sweeping aside the dews.

On a sudden impulse, as it seemed, he left his studio, and ran lightly down the old broad oaken stairs, and went out into the garden. He was at her side ere she had heard his steps that fell so lightly on the grass. She started a little, and turned from him, as I noticed, having followed him myself out into the balmy evening air.

'Madelon,' he said to her, with a tremor in his voice, 'Madelon,—it you will let it be so, you shall never sit at the lattice alone.'

She gave him one quick glance under her dark deep lashes: then she was silent, her hand gathering the feathery crowns of tall seedling grasses that grew round her.

'May it be so?' he murmured. 'Have you faith enough in me to let me enter your life? You can make me what you will: will you give me place beside you always?'

She did not answer, but her drooped face flushed till all its colourlessness changed to a hot scarlet radiance, like the flush on the latest autumn roses.

'Tell me,' he murmured eagerly. 'Can it be—that you have less pity for me than for that glow-worm that you lifted out of harm a moment ago? I love you, Madelon; you must have known it all this summer through, and I think—I think—you have some love to give in recompense?'

The glow died from her face; great tears stood unshed in her eyes; she trembled greatly whilst she left her hand in his.

'It is not a question of my love,' she said, scarce audibly. 'It is of your peace,—your greatness,—your future. These lie far apart from me.'

'They lie with you: with you alone!' he answered her, with passionate belief in his own truth as he drew her nearer and nearer, and stooped his golden head, and kissed her where they stood beneath the great shadows of the dying limes.'

For a moment Madelon surrendered herself to that sweet intoxication. But the breathless trance endured but a little space; she drew herself from him, and looked straight up into his eyes with that deep glance of hers that had in it such exhaustless tenderness and power of sacrifice.

'You speak in haste,' she said tremulously. 'I am the only woman near you; you have found some comprehension and some sympathy in me; you have a noble nature;—and you offer me love. But, though I love you, Carlos, I am not fit to be your wife!'

'Not fit! My God!' he cried, 'what grace, what excellence, what purity of womanhood have there ever been found lacking in you?'

'She smiled faintly; but her eyes never lost their steady, meditative wistfulness of regard.

'Nay, I speak the truth,' she said gently. 'I am but one of the people; I have ever laboured with my hands; I am ignorant, even if sympathy teach me some few things. You will be great, my friend; you will have fame, and fame brings fortune; I shall be no meet companion for you in that new life which so surely waits for you. I love you—'

She paused, and stretched her hands out to him in a gesture of infinite tenderness, though her face the while grew yet more deadly pale.

'See! I do not seek to deny it or hide it. I love you, Carlos, but *because* I love you, I know—I know—that there will be no place for me in your future!'

He seized her outstretched hands, and poured forth poetic burning words of eloquence, that thrilled out upon the stillness of the autumn twilight, and seemed to scorch and stagger her as they pierced her heart. But for her he swore he had been worthless; crushed beneath the load of poverty and of the world's neglect. Her influence alone had breathed into him the strength to give form and substance to the fair dream of an idle brain. He had no name nor place in the world as yet: should he win either ever, it would be through her inspiration; through that brave acceptance of the yoke of toil, which, beholding in her, he at length had followed.

So he urged and pleaded till the ardent eloquence of words was as a whirl of fire in which her thought and her will were caught, and blinded, and consumed. Yet not wholly; for this woman's love was—unlike the love of her sex—without one taint of selfishness, or of vain desire, or of untrue appraisement.

'You speak generously,' she murmured, whilst her heart heaved and her lips quivered. 'But you speak in blindness. You love me now—O yes!—but for how long? Nay, it is not that I distrust you. I distrust myself. I may be well in your sight here—here in solitude and in summer—but with the moment that brings you fame, and that the world usurps you, I shall be no more than a kindly memory in your heart—'

'A memory! If ever I love you less, if ever I leave your side, may God—'

'Hush! The future is not in your hands; not in mine. Call no curse upon it. It will not be possible that you should love me always. I have not beauty; I have not knowledge; I am only, after all, a peasant trained to household labours. If I were to become your wife, what would you say in the years to come?—you would say this woman has no likeness with my life as it stands now; no kinship with my fame; no fitness for my career. You would say it—assuredly—in your own heart—'

'Are you mad?' he cried with impetuous interruption. 'Am I a noble or a prince, that you should look on me with this proud humility—treat me thus, as though I were some creature of a higher sphere descended to you? You know my history, my poverty, my dependence on my own labours; the neglect the world has had of me, the chances that I shall never be able, do what I may, to give my name to fame. As I stand now, I am barely your equal. You have certain possessions; I have none. To me this sweet and tranquil place is the happiest home that I have ever known. Is it a little thing to ask you to let me share it always?—to ask you to let me, in the fever and disappointments of a painter's career, always have its rest and innocence to return to for shelter and for hope? No! it is because it is so great a thing—a thing so utterly beyond my rights to claim and my power to requite—that you draw yourself aloof from me, and plead your own unworthiness, in the noble falsehood of a woman's pity!'

The words poured from his lips with all the vivacious fire of his southerner's temperament, and with all the fiery reproach of that upbraiding selfishness which always sounds upon a woman's ear as love itself incarnate. It moved her strangely. The colour came and went upon her face; her limbs trembled; her lips parted with swift uneven breaths. She looked up swiftly in his face with the great tears heavy on her lashes.

'Ah, if I could be of use or service to you,' she murmured; 'if I could be sure that you never could repent.'

She needed to say no more: he stooped again his beautiful fair head, and his lips rested on hers unchidden.

They wandered long together that evening, through the lonely moonlit orchards, and the deep cool gardens; on which the last glow, and the last breeze, and the last sigh of the dying summer were lingering, as though loth to pass away and leave the earth to silence, snow, and shadow.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FAUSTINA VICTRIX.

Life at the Silver Stag, which had been full of peace before, now deepened into happiness. The beatitude of confessed and mutual love was there; nor was there any hindrance to it, nor any shade to mar it.

The old Mère Bris had grown to regard with unusual favour this golden-haired young stranger, who treated her with all a son's reverent kindliness; and she offered no opposition to his marriage with Madelon, desiring only that he should achieve some public success that should be a guarantee of his ability to add somewhat to her own slender store. And to this Carlos Merle offered but little opposition: he was too proud and honest to seek to live in idleness upon these women; and, indeed, though he knew it not, so much of the desire of rest, and so little of the desire of passion, was in his love, that it was almost enough to him to be certain of this simple asylum and this innocent affection that he had already gained. So all things went smoothly and joyously in this primitive and pleasant spot. His pictures were completed; his time was his own; he could spend it at will with Madelon; aiding her in her out-door tasks; watching her in her in-door occupations; listening kindly to the old dame's legendary lore; and even spending his strength in such useful fashion as the hewing of wood for the winter firing, and the fetching of buckets of water from the distant well in the orchard. As for Madelon—there was in her fathomless eyes such a look of tranquil intensity, of unutterable joy, as I have never seen on any human face; she spoke but seldom; but her voice as she sang at her work had the sweetness in it of one continual hymn of praise; and to her the russet autumn was as the golden dawning of years of perpetual summer.

Russ alone was ill-satisfied.

'It is not well,' he muttered to me. 'It is not well. He is sincere?—O yes, he is sincere; men mostly are whilst they talk of love. But it is only affection with him; there is no passion in it; and no man, with his beauty and

his nature, ever passes by passion all his life long. He will know that one day—and she too. But we can do no good. Don't let us talk of it.'

'Is passion such a good thing, then?'

Russ growled a whole satire.

'Good? It is a devil, my dear: and one that the dog I told you about never succeeded in driving out, whether from church, or castle, or cottage. It is a devil that will tempt Carlos Merle, sooner or later; and it will drag him away from her in the end, let him seek or strive as he may.'

The winter soon came. It was very cold, but very bright. Carlos sold a little landscape to a stranger who, resting at the Silver Stag, chanced to see, and paid five gold pieces for it; and he spent all the five in purchasing a set of furs for Madelon. She chid him gently for the extravagance, but smiled on him for the love shown therein. She wrapped them about her mother, and moved blithely in the snow to feed her poultry and her doves, quite warm in her dress of serge, from the rapture and the peace that dwelt together in her heart.

The broad low kitchen of the place was always ruddily bright from the big fire of wood that burned on an old-fashioned hearth, built long, they said, ere stoves were known. It had a pleasant odour always in it, from the many herbs that hung from the ceiling beams; knots of dried thyme, and marjoram, and sage, and rue. The reddened light of the stormy winter days played cheerily upon the brass and pewter that, shining like gold and silver, filled the black oak shelves.

All day long the little birds would crowd under the casements for food that Madelon threw them; and the droll-visaged ducks, and the neat coquettish hens, when wet or cold, would come through the door she opened for them—the former with solemn march, and shrewd all-seeing eyes, the latter with coy dainty steps, and shy sidelong glances—and go straightway to the hearth, and there sit and dry their plumage and dress themselves, and turn their heads over their shoulders to survey themselves, precisely as I have seen great ladies do before their mirrors. When dusk closed in, and the fowls were all at roost, and the oil lamp lighted, Russ and I would lie alone within the warmth of the logs, watching, with dreamy pleasure, the big copper

kettle of soup swinging in the chimney; while old Mère Bris dozed in the corner, and Madelon, with her great eyes all dilated and eloquent, listened to some *chant du siècle* read aloud to her by her lover's melodious vibrating voice.

It was a happy winter time; and in it I almost forgot my two past years of misery. Not quite: for a dog never wholly forgets; and, having its spirit once broken, is never altogether the same dog again. Naturally the eyes of creatures of our race are fuller of glee, mirth, readiness, and gladness than the eyes of any other living things; but most of them are clouded by sadness, by terror, and by the constant apprehension which your brutal training leaves on them, long before they have even reached their prime.

It was a hard winter, so far as cold went. The great black woods were ice-bound, and the water of the duck-pond had to be broken every morning for the old carp to breathe. Madelon put over the doorway a little oat-sheaf for the birds, in a fashion she had learned of some German artist; and the casements were thick with dense, white, glittering frost with every dawn that rose. But though so chill without, life went within gladly and brightly. The first real chill of the year seemed to fall when it was no longer possible for Carlos to longer defer his visit to the Salon.

His pictures had been accepted; he went to the assembling of the critics. He was to rest there the night, and was to return on the morrow, bringing his tidings with him. As he quitted the little porch Madelon thrust a covered basket into his hand.

'It is the carrier-dove Fleurette,' she whispered to him, while her voice was full of love not spoken in phrases. 'She has often become between this and Paris. If all be well with you, loose her. She will be back here in two hours.'

So Fleurette went with him on his pilgrimage; for the electric wires were a costliness not dreamed of by these poor and simple people. Russ, and I, and Madelon tarried behind in the old, oaken, dusky chamber. It was a drear, dark day, with fitful gusts of storm-wind, and sudden driving clouds of rain—a day full of melancholy and of foreboding; a day that makes dogs howl, and men pen satires, and women sit all day long wearily watching the

sweeping on and off of the black mists. Madelon did her household work of the day none the less quickly or well; but every now and then she started, as a blast shook the house; and when her labour was done, sat with fevered cheeks by the casement, looking out with wistful eyes for the clearance of the skies that should allow the dove's soft, slender wings to beat their safe way home. Her whole soul was in her lover's fame, even though she knew fame was her cruelliest rival.

The day passed very wearily to us all.

There came back no Fleurette.

Madelon kept the shutters down an hour later than was her custom, and stood gazing out into the shadowy bleak night for the white small form of her messenger of hope.

'Close the window, *ma fille*,' called her old mother from the chimney-corner. 'It is quite dark, and there may come beggars around, or worse—drawn by the light in the lattice.'

Madelon obeyed with that curiously implicit obedience which characterises French filial duty, and came and sat down by her lamp; and began to sew—mending a worn summer blouse of Carlos Merle's. Her mother did not see that her eyes were wet with tears—but I saw. *Je reste: tu t'en vas!* Such is eternally the requiem over all women's loves; when the woman has loved well.

The long evening went slowly, very slowly. The bubbling of the copper pot, and the crackling of the fire logs, were the only sounds upon its stillness. Russ once moved toward her, and laid his great head on her knee, and gazed into her face with great loving eyes of sympathy and reverent pity. Madelon stopped and kissed him, and tears fell on his forehead.

'It is thus that it must be, Russ,' she murmured over him.

The evening and the night passed; the morning broke fairer, though still cold. About noon a little flash of white glimmered in the steely sky; there was a murmuring noise; and, beating against the casement, there fell down the dove. Madelon caught her with a low cry.

She was not cold nor wet, and could not have been loosed until that morning. He had forgotten to send her home.

Beneath her left wing was a note. As Madelon read it she grew pale—paler than she ever had been through all this winter-time.

'What does he say?' cried the old mother from her chimney-corner, eager to learn the best or worst.

Madelon waited a moment ere she replied. When she did so her voice was calm.

'Only three words, *ma mère*. "Success! Return to-morrow."'

'To-morrow!' cried Mère Bris. 'He said this day—this day, beyond a doubt.'

'Yes. But how likely it is that he has met with friends, and—see, *mère*—he has success at last. No wonder he stays from us!'

Then she left the chamber; closing the door upon her, and carrying with her the tired, thirsty, ruffled dove.

Carlos did not come that day, nor the next, nor the next.

Madelon said nothing, not a word, save at such times as she answered, to her mother's petulant quibbles, that it was natural and fitting he should stay; that he was his own master; and that he owed them nothing.

But the time dragged drearily; and she never sent Fleurette back to the city.

With the fourth day indeed he came, sweeping through the snow, with his yellow locks on the wind, and his fair face hot with proud passionate glow. He rushed straight to where Madelon stood, having risen in startled amaze; he clasped her hands, he kissed her dress, he showered letters, and papers, and gold upon her lap; at first he flung himself at her feet, and letting his head drop down upon her knees, sobbed like a woman.

'I have the desire of my life!' he cried to her. 'I have the desire of my life—I am famous!'

It seemed, as I gathered awhile afterwards, that he had in truth achieved the most singular success of the winter exhibitions, and redeemed, almost in a day, the painful and long decade of disappointment and of failure. The general crowds of Paris flocked to stand before the Faustine; but some half-score of perfect judges offered him well-nigh its weight in gold for that little study of the woman at the lattice.

Faustine was one of those wonderful and instantaneous successes which sometimes seize on the world with a force quite outside criticism, and quite beyond attack.

People flocked in herds to see it; and on the class of which it was the representative it seemed, they said, to exercise the strongest and most irresistible fascination.

The day of the first exhibition had been a day of unshadowed triumph for Carlos. His name had leapt to all the lips of Paris; and great artists, long neglected and contemptuous of him, had turned and surveyed him with a curious puzzled look, as though they said, 'Eh, then, who is this that has been amongst us, and that we have denied!'

They denied him no longer. The popular voice is very seldom indeed the voice divine; but occasionally it does speak with the prescience, the spontaneity, the irresistible verdict of a godlike fiat. It spoke thus in his election; and against such a choice his rivals had no power.

The Faustine had been sold ere it had hung two hours—sold for an enormous sum, as many said. For the Woman at the Lattice he had, with an artist's and a lover's improvident, unwise spirit of fanciful attachment, refused all the offers made to him.

'Are you mad?' painters had whispered him. 'Faustine in a year will be worth to you millions of francs, and that little panel will never again fetch so much as they tender you for it now.' But Carlos had shaken his head, and been firm. 'Shall a man sell his soul?' he had said in his heart. So the Faustine hung there, sold at her birth, as befitted the likeness of a courtesan; but for the woman in the moonlight there was no gold chaffered.

And he came back to us, wild and drunk with the wine of his fame; he wept, he laughed, he threw himself like a child before the crucifix; he scattered grain in huge golden showers to the birds upon the snow; he waltzed, he sang, he was like one possessed; and all this was beautiful in him, because his own youth had so much beauty, and all his ecstasies had so much truth. Then he grew very quiet, and came and stretched himself upon the hearth, and lay there with his head leaning upon Madelon's knee.

'I shall be great,' he murmured passionately to her. 'Already—in a day—my name is famous, and men say of my work that it has in it the germ of the eternal. And what

should I have been without you—you, to whom riches, and fame, and honours, and life, all are due?'

Her face was in shadow, and he was not looking up to it, but into the burning embers of the wood; or he would have seen a smile upon it that only the martyrs wear.

'Be great; be greatest,' she whispered to him. 'So shall I be content.'

And yet I think she knew so well that, saying this, she also said, 'Go from me, and never more return.'

Division already had commenced: passion and ambition will scarce ever live together. They are as two fierce parasites which will not share with that which they cling to and corrode, but must have all or nothing. Here and there, indeed, they may grow side by side together; when they do, the world has no strength to stand against that furious fusion of strange forces.

The first note of fame to him brought the first note of pain to her. He needed now to be perpetually passing to Paris. It seems that fame is such an *ignis fatuus* that a man, if he once lose his personal watch over it, fears to see it sink into the marshes of oblivion.

It was natural that he rejoiced in his fresh-won success; that the new voices of praise were very sweet upon his long-thirsting ear; that the new life which had opened for him allured him with an enchantment he scarcely sought to resist.

It was natural, moreover, for his name's sake, or he thought it was, that he should have a studio in the heart of the artist-world, now that this world was busied with his works. All Madelon said was simply, 'What is best for thee, is for me happiest.'

The old mother grumbled at the thought of his considering some other abode so needful for him, just because he had won his way a little on to the tongues of men.

But he pleaded his excuse with his graceful kindly filial fashion.

'Nay, *mère*, it is not a home that I seek; my home is here,' he answered. 'I do but go to Paris as to an armoury-shop, where I may be nigh at hand for the battle; to circumvent my foes, and to secure my victories.'

And Madelon urged his cause also. 'It is best, indeed, *mère*. All painters must have a working-place in Paris. The world is never so fond of genius that it will ever run far into

strange corners and village-hearths to seek it. It is best out in the mart, with the rest of men's merchandise.'

'You do not want to be happy, Madelon!' retorted the old woman sharply.

Madelon smiled—that same sweet dreamy smile that had such an unfathomable meaning in it.

'Nay, *mère*,' she answered, 'let him be so first.'

So it came to pass that, when the turn of the year came, and the first signs of life were stirring under the bark of the trees, and the ice of the pools, and the dark sodden mould of the gardens, Carlos Merle had a studio of his own in the heart of the Art-world of Paris, and stayed there all the week, and only came to the Silver Stag at the close of each sixth day.

It was inevitable, I suppose; they said so. Paris had a place for him now, and he went to fill it; the voices were glad about him, they were pleasant on his ear. The world spoke his name; he liked to hear it sounding. Men pointed him out when he passed; and was proud of that finger-homage. Crowds stood all day long about his pictures; he was pleased to stand near also, and see that worship of the multitude which worships the artist as it worships the god—blindly and yet unerringly. It was natural, I suppose, that Paris should draw him thus, daily and daily, more and more towards it. It was natural, doubtless; but at the Silver Stag the spring was dreary.

The sweet scent of the russet fallow turned upwards under the Plough; the bees began to boom about in the pale sunshine; the ducks found shoots of cress under the chill water; the swallows came from Africa, and as they twittered underneath the eaves, told to the home-staying doves a thousand stories of the old Libyan world. It was earliest spring with all things; but it seemed to us rather like the setting than the resurrection of the year.

Yet Carlos came with every seventh day—came with burning eyes, and eager words, and proud glad laughter, and spoke incessantly of the great life that had opened to him with his victory. The world was transfigured to him. He was no longer poor, or neglected, or alone. He had present ease and future wealth secured. Men sought him; houses opened to him; friends came around him; he was known; and in that one word there lies for genius all the width that yawns between heaven and hell. The very suddenness of it made it the

sweeter; and he went to the phantasmagoria of the world with all the eagerness, and almost all the ignorance, of a child.

Vice had had scant temptation for him earlier, because clothed in rags rather than in robes. But now pleasure, for the first time, smiled on him from the sweet gay eyes of dainty, velvet-footed, silvery-voiced women. Their allurements were not easily forgotten when he returned to the quiet homely innocence of his little woodland shelter. Not that he loved it less, or less loved Madelon; but he seemed like the carrier-birds, which, though they are never easy until they have reached their home, yet, resting but a moment there, desire to fly forth again.

He poured out on her the same passionate gratitude. He still beheld in her the force whereby he had been lifted up to greatness. He came to her for all his highest inspirations. He brought to her, as of yore, all his thoughts, and his hopes, and his dreams. He beheld in her the most perfect of created women, whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to unloose. But still with the sunrise of every first day of the week he went, as an arrow from the bow; and though his eyes oftentimes looked back, his swift feet never tarried once.

On some of these seasons of departure he would take me with him, having grown to like me in a fashion, though not deeply. Take me into the great white gleaming city, that seemed all colour, and tinsel, and marble, and foliage; and into his little *atelier*, where already the world was flocking, because he had painted a courtesan in such sort that all of her kind recognised their own likeness.

The *atelier* was somewhat high in air, in a famous part of the artist-town. He had taken it from a rich young amateur, and it was full of eastern stuffs, curious woods, cabinets, cushions, and all manner of quaint glittering rubbish brought from Asian bazaars. Its window looked on a pile of zinc roof, and its spiral staircase was dark and narrow, and its north light was obscured. If I had been an artist, I think I should never have painted so well in this small, luxurious, gaudy chamber, with its stuffs, and metals, and skins, as in that broad, low, wooden room, all open to the light, and swept by the free winds of heaven, and scented by the odours of the woods and fields without. Indeed, I know not why it was, but I felt a curious fancy that in this Parisian studio Carlos would

never paint again as he had painted when the Faustine rose to life.

This little, dusky, bedizened, crowded, gilded chamber, with its pieces of art and its fabrics of India, might be a paradise to him, because to him it represented resurrection from a death in life, and was as the temple of victory. But to me it was only a den, pastille-scented, charcoal-heated, stifling with artificial aroma, and bounded by four narrow close walls, all hung with fantastic gold Japanese shapes, on a ground of black, that made me shudder whenever I looked at them.

It was not dull, for there were throngs all day long coming in and going out; men and women also, who came because the Faustine was the fashion. Beside, that singular beauty which he possessed was fair in the sight of the sated dames of the capital, as in the thoughtful wistful eyes of Madelon. It was a beauty untamed and yet soft, virile and yet appealing, that had a sorcery for women; and ere long the great ladies of Paris vied to seat this superb young painter at their board and welcome him within their presence-chambers. '*Je suis pauvre*,' he would object to their flattering overtures, with his gracious half-proud diffidence. '*Qu'est-ce que c'est ça?*' they would answer.

So, though he waited within all the day, I was always left alone at twilight, and the key was turned in the studio-door, and rarely ever again unturned until the first streak of dawn. He painted scarcely at all. How could he? He had done so much in the summer and early autumn, because he had gone to bed almost with the kine, and risen always with the lark. But now that his days and evenings were all spent either in the gay wild laughing company of wits, and rhymesters, and playwrights, and artists, or in the dazzling brilliancies of the great world of society, work was impossible.

Do not think that Carlos spent all his gains upon himself. O no! He spent them royally; and every manner of good thing and gracious gift found the way to Mère Bris or to Madelon. He had received as many orders as he would have been able to execute, working at the hardest, in the coming two years; and no thought that an hour's illness, a street accident, a horse's kick, might turn his Eldorado afresh into a desert, ever weighed on the sunny

sanguine glow of his fervid temperament. He intended to labour assiduously, he said—when—when all this novelty should have worn off—when he should have in a measure, received his recompense for his ten years of weariness and pain.

So that when with every sixth day he went to the Silver Stag, and the old mother would ask petulantly of him what the week's work had beheld done, he would murmur hurriedly a thousand picturesque words, sketching a thousand picturesque scenes. It was the spring; it was just April; it was the height of the world's follies. All things seemed so fair and new; people were kind; and the days fled so fast; and friendships such as those he made were fame and fortune likewise. And Madelon, who never asked him questions such as these, would call softly across to her mother from whence she sat at work by the casement, 'Carlos is right, *mère*. It is such people as these that are fitting for him; their voices are fame.'

But I think she only said it to disarm the sharpness of the old woman's irritable tongue; for I think that Madelon knew that the greatness of the artist cannot come from without; that genius is a curlew best rocked on the tossing crest of a roughened sea; and that for him by whom a thirsty ear is lent to the world's homage, the tocsin of feebleness, if not of failure, has already sounded.

The gladness of the man is come when the crowds lisp his name, and the gold fills his hand, and the women's honeyed adulations buzz like golden bees about his path; but how often is the greatness of the artist gone and gone for ever!

Because when the world denies you it is easy to deny the world; because when the bread is bitter it is easy not to linger at the meal; because when the oil is low it is easy to rise with dawn; because when the body is without surfeit or temptation it is easy to rise above earth on the wings of the spirit. Poverty is very terrible to you, and kills your soul in you sometimes; but it is like the northern blast that lashes men into Vikings; it is not the soft luscious, south wind that dulls them into lotus-eaters.

In the north wind Carlos Merle had staggered to his feet, and been proud, and been strong, and had conquered; in the south he was ready to say, 'It is sweet; leave me alone; I have lived!'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CLÉOPÂTRE.

'It is as you said,' I lamented to Russ.

'Of course,' he made answer, 'where two people love it is always the deep heart that breaks itself for the shallow one. O—I do not say his is shallow really, but it is for this passion. Do you not know that a man's passions are just like the channels of water-courses? some seasons they are narrow as runlets, others they are as broad as rivers; sometimes a child can straddle athwart them, and plumb them with his little forefinger, and at others a man shall not cross them with safety to his own life. It just depends on how the storm has come down.'

Which was no doubt true; and the storm-drum never yet has beaten that has warned men of a fatal passion.

So the spring time came, and went, sadly at the Silver Stag; though there was no lack of guests and of passers-by all through that lovely cowslip time. There were always artists, of some standing or another, staying there, from the grey-headed masters to the laughter-loving students, and one and all these talked of Carlos Merle.

By Madelon's desire no one knew aught of the relationship between them, and so they spoke of him fully and frankly as of a familiar mutual theme of interest. It was only when they touched, as she thought, too closely on the personal matters of his life that she would check their converse; as though, in the pure undivided loyalty of her soul, she feared to seem to do him the dishonour to glean by hearsay what he withheld from confidence. But old Manon Bris, less scrupulous and more inquisitive, asked all she could of his life in the city from the men who came beneath her roof, and caught many glimpses in it of extravagance, and heedlessness, and pleasure, that wore the look of evil to her sturdy peasant's mind.

'Carlos lives as a prince in Paris,' she muttered to her daughter.

'O no, *mère*,' Madelon answered her in deprecation. 'He lives as every artist that is at all known must do. Do not believe that boy Looloo's chatter; he is a little scaramouch,

who thinks it a feast to get a full meal of roast chestnuts, his people have always been so poor, and he is such a child; he can be of no judge of how a man should live.'

'Carlos was as poor two months ago!'

'Not quite, *mère;* and beside, if he were, he has earned a large wage, and a just, since then; he may surely have some pleasure from the price of his own labours.'

'He will never marry you, Madelon,' muttered the old woman, in discontent and doubt.

'He would marry me now, *mère*, if I would have it so,' Madelon answered her gently.

And this was true, for every time that Carlos came back, thither he renewed with almost feverish entreaty his offer of an immediate union. But perhaps Madelon detected the accent of honour only, and not of passion in his words; or perhaps she felt, that he sought to bind his will by law, because he felt it unstable in inclination; at any rate she answered to him always, 'Not yet.'

It was not from any fear for herself I am sure. Madelon was not the kind of woman that fears; I think it was rather that she feared for him, and that she desired to leave this beautiful future, which was now unclosing to him, altogether free and entirely without claim or lien on it.

'Servitude is well for women,' she would say to him; 'they are hardly happy free; but with men it is otherwise:—liberty is the very marrow of their bones.'

And she would not wed with him earlier than that late autumn time which her mother had originally fixed. Yet though she was so resolute, her cheeks grew thinner, and her eyes larger and brighter every day; and I think that, if she had once heard the pleading of actual love quiver in his voice, she would have put her hand in his and never have withdrawn it till the priest's benediction had made it his own.

Maybe those women are happiest who easily deceive themselves. Madelon was not of them. The essential truthfulness in her made her, no doubt, specially keen to feel any grain of truth that was lacking in others. 'He does not really love me,' she had told herself the very night on which she first heard of his love; and the lowliness of her self-esteem made it appear to her impossible that he ever should do so.

The full deep spring came; the great plumes of the lilacs nodding everywhere, and the grasses all yellow with cowslip bells. The days began to grow long, and be sultry at noon. The mavises and linnets sang all the light hours through, scarce still even at the noontide. But over the place a certain sadness fell—in the deserted painting-room the shadows lay unbroken by any passing foot; to the well in the orchard Madelon went alone; nor even now would she wait to bind a coil of ivy round the handle of the pail, or gather the big white marguerites that grew there, to make of their petals a sundial for love. In the few times that brought thither a laughing group of students and of girls, she served them silently with wine and milk, honey and meat, coffee and cake, and then withdrew herself, so far as might be possible, from out the hearing of the mirthful cadences of laughter; and in the evenings, when the day was done and the little latch lay quiet in the gate, she would take her work and sit beside the open lattice, looking ever and again at the calm gray sky beyond, as in the picture he had drawn.

But the look that was in her eyes no longer seemed the same. The hush of maidenhood was gone, the rapture of marriage and maternity had not come; there was only the vague, passionate, dumb anguish of the womanhood, which, in the same hour that it learns passion, learns likewise abandonment.

Now, amongst those youths who came and went in the golden April days, amongst the lilacs of the Silver Stag, young painters of careless tongue and mirthful mischief, there were many who spoke of the doings of Carlos in Paris, and tangled many names with his, as young men will. But chiefly they quoted one, a name of melody and meaning—Cléopâtre.

Madelon grew paler whenever the name was mentioned; but she never asked whom it might mean. Perhaps she knew.

'You are painting the portrait of Cléopâtre?' she said straightly to him when he next came. He started and looked at her.

'Who told you so?'—it was the first thing that he had not of his own accord related to her.

'The students say so,' she answered. 'Is it true?'

'Yes; it is true, for that matter.'

Her voice sank very low.

'She is a bad woman, Carlos?'

'A vile woman—'

'Why have you aught to do with her then?'

'To do!—she is a perfectly beautiful woman; she sought a portrait of me. She is an empress in her way. Was it worth while to refuse?'

He spoke hurriedly, bending to and fro a bough of blossoming lilac.

'I thought you would never paint portraits?'

'No, nor do I—but this woman is like no one else. She is a woman that comes once in five centuries!'

'She is so beautiful?—I understand.'

'No, you cannot understand,' he muttered. 'Madelon, Madelon, I swear to you that I never hated the Faustine of my fancy more than I hate this hell-born Cléopâtre!'

She looked at him earnestly; and a shudder ran through her.

'You defied Faustine!' she murmured with a shiver. 'O, my love, my love, my love,—beware!'

It was one of the few moments in which the great affection in her broke up into yearning and passionate speech.

Carlos stooped and kissed her; but his face was flushed, and his caressing answer was incoherent in its breathless and vague promise.

And with the dawn of the morning he went back to Paris.

During the week, which was now May, there came many parties of students to the gardens of the Silver Stag; and they often spoke this one name—Cléopâtre. So they had christened a strange woman, come two summer seasons earlier to Paris. They spoke of her great torch-light fête, of her carriage with silver wheels, of her great sapphire hollowed for a sweetmeat box, of her domino powdered with fire-flies in gold, of her enormous stakes won at games of dice, of her tiny house, that though so small was as perfect as a palace, and filled with all fabulous worth. And they said, also, with gay laughter, that her last caprice was Carlos Merle.

'Your old friend will fare ill, Madelon,' they laughed to her, not meaning cruelly, because they knew not where

they wounded. 'He goes every day to paint the portrait of Cléopâtre—O, hé—and no man can look long upon her and live! They say that seeing how he had painted the Faustine, she was minded to have her vengeance.'

Madelon never made answer; except once, when she said, gravely, that to speak at all of such as Cléopâtre to honest women was not well. Which silenced the reckless youths; and made them mute on the subject, for they held her in reverence and love.

As for me, where he left me in the quiet country place, I wondered ceaselessly what she could be, this strange and marvellous creature, whom they had christened thus; they had depicted her in their words till I seemed to behold her, with her full-lidded lustrous eyes, that had such magnetism in them; with her curling lips, that so seldom spoke, yet breathed a sorcery over men; and with her chain of tawny topaz, that seemed like a yellow snake about her throat.

Any way,—I felt that she was evil.

As the season grew, and the summer came, the men who spent their leisure at the *auberge* ceased to speak of Carlos Merle when Madelon or her mother were by. When they were alone, I heard them talk of him, of how his head was turned by the delirium of success, of how he was like one drunk with his triumphs; of how he flung his gold broadcast, so that he must soon be more utterly than ever a beggar; of how he was devoured body and soul by one passion, and of how his genius was consuming as a reed in a flame.

'It is Cléopâtre,' they said. 'She kills them all so. You remember the Prince de Ferras!—ruined in one winter, and run through the heart for her by a Russian, when she had pillaged him to her will. Recall too how it was with Bernaldés, when he had wakened up all Europe with that Venus of his—how she set herself to steal the nerve from his arm, and the cunning from his hand, and the fire from his brain, till he never rounded a line of marble more, but died raving mad in Bicêtre! It will be the same here.'

'It is Cléopâtre,' another echoed one day: an old wise man, grown gray in the service of Art. 'There are women who abhor genius; women to whom it is horrible that a man should live who can be sufficient for himself; women

who set themselves to tempt, and corrupt, and destroy it, as the devils of the legends set themselves to kill innocence. It offends them, insults them, escapes them, outrages them, because it defies them—and they set themselves to have their vengeance on it; and to drag it down into the dust, where they can spit on it. There are women whose whole life is a war against all that lifts men out of hell; they are scorpions who spit death upon every holy thing.'

Did Madelon hear as well as I heard?

Sometimes I feared that she did, for her face grew utterly weary, and she never once now lilted a song as she worked. What could she do?

Ah, nothing!—only wait, and wait, and wait with that sublime patience which is the heroism of such women.

The throbbing summer came; all heat, and colour, and storm, and wondrous light. There seemed fire in all the scarlet roses and all the electric skies, and all the hot hard days, in which the very bees seemed drunk, and the very cattle drugged. Everything was silent, and gasping, and white with furnace heat, all things languished, stupefied yet burning, as a man may lie in the height of a mortal fever.

In the sultry height of the summer the visits of Carlos altogether ceased.

There came no word of explanation from him, there was only silence.

The long evening stole away on every Saturday, and sank down into night, and the little click of the latch sounded no more through the stillness. The Sunday noons brought with them the gay glad parties of youths and maidens who romped together through the tall seeding grasses and the yellowing corn, who loaded themselves with fruits and garlands of green leaves, who danced in the dewy starlight, and sang, and shouted, and chased each other through the shady espaliers and the blossoming lime-tree walks. But he came no more with either noon or night; we heard no more the gladsome challenge of his voice, we saw no more the proud, bright, golden head like the head of a young god.

To the incessant questions of old Manon Bris, the painters who strayed thither only muttered now in answer that he was well, that he was much sought in the world, that he was busied incessantly upon the portrait of Cléopâtre; and they would add no more, or had no more to add.

'You are sure it is well with him?' Madelon once asked of a white-headed artist, laying her hands upon his arm, with a look from which his eyes turned away.

'It is well with his body, with his fame, with his riches,' the old man muttered. 'Not well with his soul.'

On the morrow Madelon told her mother that she was about to go to Paris. The old woman did not seek to oppose her, and she was merciful enough to ask nothing of her errand.

Once she grumbled that, in her own youth, she would have thought it shame to go seek one who neglected her for a wanton; in her own girlhood women had deemed that a lover who was not kept by his fancy was ill-kept by his troth-ring. But her daughter only smiled as she heard—the faint fleeting smile of one whose thoughts lie too deep for tears, and whose love lies too high to be gauged by mortal eyes; of one who is indifferent to appearance or to misconstruction. And at noon she went, wrapping about her a large dark cloak, and letting the fierce sun beat upon her unshaded head.

To Russ she signed to stay and guard the house; for me she stopped, as though seeming to pity my wistful look of unspoken petition, and bore me with her beneath her arm.

I believe that in a manner the presence near her of a little living thing which he had cherished had its consolation, and that I brought her sympathy because I loved him.

It was a very burning after-day as we entered the city. The dust was thick and gray upon the streets, and the glare was great from the whiteness of the houses; there was not a breath of wind stirring, and the air smelt hot and sickly, and as though it were loaded with wine fumes, and the reek of opium smoke.

Here and there a mosquito hooted, and a hornet buzzed, above the thronging crowds.

Here and there the scarlet glitter of a troop of soldiers flashed through the shadowless sunlight, like a blood-red shape of death.

She walked on long, not seeming to heed the oppression of the weather, or the scorching of the stones. She was not very certain of her way, and mistook it, and traced her steps only again to retrace them very often. Presently we came to a place that was thickly thronged; and the people

were coming in and out of the house, and talking very eagerly amongst themselves, and she could hear the word that constantly recurred,—'Cléopâtre, Cléopâtre.'

'Is it there?' Madelon asked, and I saw her lips were dry and white as she did so. They told her that it was. She felt for a small coin, and paid it in, where she saw others paying theirs, at a hole in the wall, where a money-taker sat; then she passed through with the rest into a chamber hung with crimson cloth, into which the people were pressing eagerly. I was hidden beneath her cloak, and passed in with her.

The room was lighted by a flood of light pouring downward from the top, and this light was so managed that it fell wholly on a solitary picture at the further end, set in a carved frame of ebony.

It was not a large picture; but the multitude were breathless before it, as they had stood before Faustine.

'It is her living self!' they murmured.

They meant the Cléopâtre.

She lay on a couch of purples and of lion skins, with her head leaning back on her arm, and her limbs lightly crossed on each other; she was unclothed save where some heavy folds of a Tyrian robe were flung across her, and save for heavy rings of massive gold that clasped her ankles and her wrists; she seemed just waking from slumber, and her eyes looked out from under their languid lids with a peculiar glittering, furtive, voluptuous, merciless regard, whilst with one hand she drew against her scarlet lips one gorgeous blossom of the pomegranate.

In the distance, beyond a marble archway, were the reeds reddening in the after-glow, the ruby skies of sunset, and one slender palm shaft cutting sharp against the gold of an Egyptian night.

It was a wondrous picture: marvellous because in its revival of the dead beauty of old Nile it also gave the living presentment of that beauty which Paris saw amidst it every day.

It was Cléopâtre—but Cléopâtre living, no less than Cléopâtre dead.

'It is she!' they murmured in ecstasy; for Cléopâtre was in a measure dear to them, by reason of that supremacy in infamy, that mercilessness in destruction, which made her

heroic and deified in their sight. And it was she indeed they said, as they stood about the picture; all the dreamy sensualism, all the dormant power, all the oriental langour; all the leonine force that were in the living woman were in the portrait also.

'Before he could have painted *that*,' muttered an aged artist as he gazed, 'he must have sold his soul to her.'

Madelon gazed on it as on some dread thing that compelled her regard, even whilst it blinded her, as the lightning fascinates, yet withers up the eyesight. I felt her tremble as she looked; and she seized for support the brass rod that ran before the painting, severing the niche where it hung from the crowd of sight-seers.

The cruelty and the splendour of this beauty seemed to fascinate, and to paralyse her, almost, as they did all men that gazed on them. She gazed on them. She gazed, and gazed, and gazed, until every drop of blood faded from her lips and cheeks; as though it were drawn out and absorbed by that imperial, scornful, deep-hued face, that made her own pale as a corpse, and poor as a faded violet.

'How shall you be remembered one hour beside such as I?' the mocking, changeless, lustrous eyes seemed to demand of her in their scorn; and Madelon seemed to shiver, and droop, and die out as it were, beneath that gaze.

Those smooth, opal-hued, glistening limbs; that soft velvet skin, with the golden bloom of a fresh peach upon it: that dreaming repose of a half-banished sleep; that curling mouth that half-caressed the flower; that deep full bosom that heaved above its ceinture of dead gold: how could the man who studied these, from their warm life abandoned to his sight and touch, have had a thought, or wish, or memory left for any other thing?

She blamed him no more; she marvelled no more; but her head dropped like one who has been stricken a physical blow, and she turned, and went feebly out of the little crimson chamber, with the unsteady flickering step of bodily sickness.

To resist, to hope, to believe in herself were no more possible to her: with her own eyes she had beheld this power against which she long in blindness had contended; with her own eyes she had seen what manner of thing it was, this sorcery of the senses, this lust of the flesh, this temp-

tation by the breath of a woman, wherein the strength of her enemy lay; and she contended no more, she no more resisted, but went feebly out into the sunshine, knowing that never again could she have either place or memory within his life.

Ah! I have seen the same warfare many times; the same contest betwixt the soul and the senses, betwixt the love that is sanctity and the love that is devilry, betwixt the woman who seeks a man for the god-head there is in him, and the woman who seeks a man for the beastiality there is in him; and I have never seen it end in any other fashion than this; never seen it come to any other close, than for the lily to die away, crushed beneath his foot; and for the passion-flower to grow high, and wild, and free in triumph, above the ruin of his house.

Madelon was a woman pure of soul, high of thought, loving nobly and with innocence, desiring the greatness of that which she loved, and seeking its honour before her own joy; Cléopâtre bared her limbs to the painter's gaze, and looked into his with her burning cold eyes; and gliding forth from her bath to her mirror, with the water glistening on her polished skin, said in her soul that he should love her in such wise, that this love should kill all manhood, all conscience, all godliness, all genius within him, and deliver him over to her prostrate, worthless, a mockery of men.

Yet it was Cléopâtre, and not Madelon, that he loved.

Wherefore? Well, not because he was base; because there is a marvellous sorcery in the mere bodily beauty of women; and because there is a madness and a drunkenness in love, that go best, as it seems, with the liberty and fever of vice.

And this is why in love there is so much of woe, and so little of contentment; because pure women are too cold, and passionate women are too vile; and when men stoop for kisses, their lips are either chilled to ice, or scorched with flame. Then, being content with neither, they break the bonds of love, and are pointed at as faithless,—not with much justice in the charge.

Madelon went out into the street with the same feeble wandering gait; and her face had a wan, scared, paralysed look upon it, as though she had seen some sight that had frozen her blood and stopped the pulses of her heart.

She moved mechanically out of the throngs, and into some cool quiet gardens of the public, whose trees threw their shadows opposite the house where the portrait of Cléopâtre was hung for exhibition. The gardens were almost deserted, and she sank down into a wooden chair under the shelter of a great sweet-chestnut. One of the guardians of the place approached her, and brought her a drink of water, thinking she was faint. She put it aside gently, and asked him only to leave her in peace. She sat there quite motionless, it must have been nigh an hour; and the gray, rigid, startled look upon her face never faded away.

On the clear air the voices of the crowds, from the other side of the rails, came plainly to where we sat. They kept going in and out of the picture-chamber by hundreds all the afternoon long. Cléopâtre was known to all in Paris, and this painting of her had a fascination as wide as the city.

Ever and anon there floated on the wind little fragments of their talk; words of wonder, praise, and homage: the artist of Faustine had been great, but the artist of Cléopâtre was greater. It was well with his genius as yet.

Madelon writhed as she heard.

The desire of her prayers had been given to her, he had fame, and the world gave him honour;—and she sat alone here, forgotten by him as the picture of the woman at the lattice was forgotten by Paris before the portrait of a courtesan! She had voluntarily delivered him up to his art, she had willingly surrendered him to the claims of ambition;—and all that art and ambition had done had been to bring him to the murderous embraces, and reward him with the poisonous kisses of the deadliest temptress of Paris.

'O, could he but have been content without fame,' she cried; but she knew that he never could have been this, and that, if in selfishness she had striven to bind him down to the obscurity of her own humble and innocent life of labour, the stifled desires and the feverish unrest within him would have killed his peace in a slow torture as surely as hers was now slain at one deathblow.

She had done that which was right, though the issue thereof was evil.

After a while she rose and left the gardens, and asked her way to the place where his painting rooms were. I do not

think she knew clearly what she meant to do. I believe she only felt some vague impulse, such as a woman, whose great love yet made her humble, might well feel to look once more—and for the last time—upon his face, and leave him for ever to the infamy of the temptress who had robbed him of her.

People guided her willingly towards the artists' quarter. She knew little of the city, and in her misery seemed to have forgotten all she did know.

It was now quite late in the day, though the sun had not set; it was still intensely hot, and the crowds were growing larger, as all those whose work was done came out to seek a breath of air under the sultry yellow skies.

She made her way with some difficulty to the street where his *atelier* was; there was no one in the building except an an old negress who had the charge of it, and who did such little housework as the four or five painters living on its several floors required. This negress knew me again, and roughly bade Madelon enter her little porter's lodge, and rest. But Madelon scarcely heard, she only asked if Carlos Merle was now within the house.

The old black woman looked at her curiously, standing in her grimy den, a little old uncouth figure, black as soot, with all rude vivid colours in her ragged dress.

'Carlos Merle!' she echoed. 'No, Carlos Merle rarely comes here now.'

'He lives elsewhere?'

'Elsewhere!' the negress laughed grimly, 'elsewhere! Who are you that do not know of the caprice of Cléopâtre?'

A shudder passed over Madelon's form, but she was a resolute woman, and brave, and she asked still:

'What caprice is it that you mean?'

'Why! her caprice, for sure, for this golden-curled youth whom you speak of, this Carlos whom Paris for a little season has taken to calling a genius. Cléopâtre is very famous, very rich, very powerful, she can afford such fancies! and she laughs to see all her princes and nobles so mad because she will for a while look at none but this painter."

'But she—she—' the words died on Madelon's mouth; she leaned against the wooden shaft of the lodge door, and her breath came in painful gasps.

'Well!—she what?' chuckled the negress. 'She can afford such a caprice once in a while, I tell you. Her world will only be the madder for her when she shall have tired of her young yellow-haired god, and that will be before the last summer roses are dead. He was hard to conquer, look you; he had a horror of her at the first, he shunned her, and fled from her, and that set her harder on this fancy to beat him. She will have no man look on her face and keep sane. So she set him to paint her portrait—you can see the thing now in Paris; it has taken him three months to do; and she would have it painted in the noon hours, at her own dwelling, that is all marble, they say, and gold, with purple couches, and strange plants, and all the floors of silver. Well—well—he went, and before the painting was one-half done the world only held for him that one woman. It is always so with them all. And now it is her caprice, I tell you, to have none but him near her; whenever she goes abroad he is by her; and he seldom or never leaves her roof except with her. It is a base life?—O, well, that is as it may be. I think he has shame of it,—bitter shame sometimes, but he is drunk with it, as it were; he has no will but hers. He would fling himself in the river at a sign from her.'

Madelon leaned heavily against the timber of the door, her eyes closed, her mouth panted for breath, under her clear pale skin the veins looked black.

The old negress looked at her, and seemed to take a cruel pleasure in the misery she saw she dealt.

'He is your brother, maybe? Well,—you will scarce get him out of the hold of Cléopâtre. Till her fancy slackens, at least!—and then he will be little worth getting. Last autumn she had a like caprice for Hugo Cabarrus, the composer. They all said he was the man of the future,—just as they say of this Carlos,—how did he end when she had played with him a season and spent her will on him? Why—shot himself through the head one night, after burning the score of his great opera, that they said would have ranked him with Rossini. She has done something the same with a score.'

'And such a woman lives!'

The words broke with a shriek from Madelon—the only utterance she ever gave to all the agony within her.

The negress grinned.

'Lives! She will live every hour of her life, however long it be. There is not a second that she does not enjoy. Look at her great, brown, sleepy, scornful eyes! No one ever sees them change, and how they smile at you poor fools that fret yourselves with sorrow!'

Madelon put out her hands with a piteous gesture as though praying peace; then, tottering like a woman quite worn out with age, she turned across the threshold, and passed again into the streets.

She had forgotten me: I followed her closely in and out a winding maze of roads. I think she had no sense nor knowledge where she went.

The day was wholly dying now. It was scarcely any cooler, and the great furnace glow in the west had the same red of Egypt in it that burned in that accursed picture, and made the very marble of the houses flush to colour, and gave the faces of the women all a weird and fevered look.

She wandered aimlessly, stunned with this one grief that left her no other memory than itself. None noted her; a pale, dust-stained, weary-footed woman, without beauty and with poor raiment, there was nothing to mark her from the crowds that parted to let her pass through them, without so much as noticing the agony upon her face.

Once or twice a moan broke from her; but it was too low to reach any ear in those busied and heedless throngs.

The great doors of an old church stood open; within all was cool, and dark, and silent. She sought its shadow, instinctively; turning aside from the red hot glow, and the whitened glare, and the sea of shifting and unpitying faces.

She dragged her tired limbs into a distant corner of the place where one little silver star of light burned before a picture of the Mater Dolorosa.

There she fell on her knees,—and at last wept.

It was quite night when the peal of the choir aroused her, and she crept forth from her shelter once more into the streets.

'*Ma mère!*' she muttered, as she raised me in her arms; her face was calm again, and the long habits of self-sacrifice and self-control had made her remember that her old mother

would be ere that time waiting, and watching, in doubt and anxiety for her long-delayed return.

The church was in a rich and famous quarter of the city; though so still, and gray, and old, the tide of gayest and of wildest life surged round it; the broad highway in which it stood was brilliantly illumined, and the buildings that flanked and fronted it were all ablaze with light likewise, and bright with floating banners and with gilded balconies.

As Madelon went out, from under the dark porch, all this radiance seemed to blind and to confuse her; she covered her eyes with her hand and gazed upward with the helpless look of those that are stricken sightless.

Straightway, in front and above her, was a square balconied window, open to the night. The balcony was of stone, and jutted out, canopied with amber silk, and filled with leaf and blossom; there was a strong light within that poured out through the yellow draperies into the street beneath, and in that light there leaned two forms; one that of a woman, who was carelessly thrown against the cushions, and carelessly watched the movement of the shadowy crowd below; the other that of a man who in his turn watched her, with all that passionate ecstasy, that rapt worship in his gaze, which none ever see in a man's eyes but once. And where he bent above her, half shadowed in the curtain's shelter, he stooped his head, till his lips touched the fragrant hair that loosely lay upon her shoulders.

The woman, not changing her position, smiled, and let her broad, calm, dreamy eyes rest unmoved upon the crowd beneath.

Then she stretched out her arm, that had one great eastern bangle of dead gold upon it, and pointed to the portico of the church:

'See! There is your poor fool,' she said, with the same calm scorn upon her smiling mouth. 'Will you go to her?—*now?*'

Why did this woman, who had every earthly gift and grace, and every joy in absolute possession, thus set herself to the destruction of a creature, innocent, obscure, neglected, who had never harmed or crossed her? I cannot tell—there are women who love to murder, and women against whom all innocence is crime.

The brutal mockery of the words galvanised Madelon

into sudden consciousness. She raised herself erect, and looked straight up at the broad golden casement, with its blaze of colour.

She was a proud, pure, brave-hearted creature, and she found strength in that moment to give back scorn for scorn.

He, leaning there over the white shoulder of his wicked witch, and gazing whither she pointed, met that full, upward look of unutterable rebuke, and of unchangeable forgiveness.

Their eyes rested on one another.

Carlos, seeming to lose all courage and comeliness, a. under some stroke of sorcery, shivered, and covered his face with his hands, and shrank back into the abyss of blazing light behind him.

Madelon passed onward with a steady step, and with her hands clenched upon the ivory cross above her heart.

The shadow of the church had screened her from the view of her destroyer before the time that she staggered and fell down upon the stones of the great city, as Ben Dare had fallen in the market-place of the little northern burgh.

A sweet gay burst of riotous music broke over the crowds and through the summer night. It came from the open windows of the house where Carlos had made his choice to dwell.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE QUARTER OF THE POOR.

THE first thing that I remember subsequently was the loosening of some violent pressure about my throat, and a rush of blood through my head and throat that made me blind and dizzy.

When I fully recovered consciousness, I found myself in a small low place crowded with innumerable flowers, dead and living, which filled it with an intense odour that reached to me, till I shuddered, the beautiful flower-filled

road of the *infiorata* all covered with a sea of gorse, and roses, and wild thyme, and snowy cistus-buds, and all fair summer things that grew; that road on which in Italy I had been hunted and stoned, and singed with torches, and beaten with sticks, and kicked from side to side, in the common fashion at that poetic religious rite.

A boy with a pale sympathetic face leaned over me; a woman of noble stature stood beside me. She was silent; he was speaking eagerly to a withered old man in a blue blouse.

'So the little dog bit, and tore, and foamed, and raged, grandpère,' he was saying, 'because they would move him from this poor sick woman who had fallen there, and whom they wanted to carry to the hospital; and the gendarmes bore her off upon a litter, saying she was not dead, only senseless, and they kicked the dog amongst the crowd because it strove to follow them. Then the people shrieked that it was dangerous and mad, and they called out to one another that it should be killed; and a soldier caught it and twisted a bit of cord about its throat. He was for stringing it up straightway to the lamp-iron; and would have done it too, but that madame stayed his hand, and bade him not to be so brutal to fidelity, and forced him to give up the little beast, and put it in my hands for me to bring here; and the cord was tied so tightly, I could not loose it till I came home to get a knife. I do not think the dog has any harm in it; it was not mad, it was only faithful.'

'Fidelity is madness,' muttered the woman wearily, as she turned to the old man. 'The dog is innocent enough. Let it stay here; it will be a pleasure to your grandson.'

'As madame pleases,' murmured the man, not best pleased himself, but respectfully submissive as to one he honoured and obeyed.

The woman passed up some narrow, dark, crooked stairs, in which a little dusky oil-lamp was burning; and the boy followed her until they reached a chamber in the roof. It was a small bare attic, clean as any brown stone that lies in bright brook-water, but without any sort of ornament, or indeed any sort of comfort.

The boy talked to me, stroked me, and made me a little bed of straw in one corner of the garret; the woman seemed

to have forgotten both his presence and mine as she laid aside her out-door garments, and went to a table under the lattice, where she seated herself at some kind of work—what, I could not see.

'May I leave him with you, madame?' the boy asked after a time, when his efforts to make me eat of some bread and milk were all unavailing. 'He moans and whines—I suppose for that poor woman—and grandpère might not like him down with Tambour.'

'Yes, leave him, Rémy,' she answered him absently; and the boy went out, closing the door softly.

I supposed from what they had said that my efforts to serve Madelon had been futile, and that I was severed from her in all likelihood for ever. For several days and nights I mourned unceasingly with restless, feverish grief, refusing to be comforted: the woman bore with me, and was good to me in her silent, passionless, weary manner; and the gentle-hearted boy did his utmost to console me.

He was the grandson of the old herbalist in the little shop below—a kindly tender-natured child. They were quite poor people; and the various chambers of the old, dull, antique dwelling were let by them to persons no richer than themselves—penniless students and labouring women who lived on black bread and bitter coffee, and studied or toiled early and late, and seemed only to exist to carry on that endless warfare with starvation and ruin which is all that the very poor know the word of life to mean.

I saw but little of the boy, for a few weeks later he went away to some religious place, where he was in training to be made a priest—poor gentle child, who gave his birthright of the future up in such pathetic ignorance of his immeasurable loss. The old man I rarely encountered; he was learned in simples and other herbal lore, and passed all his time in studying when he was not vending his shrubs, and herbs, and flowers. Thus I was left entirely to the woman who had saved me from the hangman's cord. This woman was called Madame Reine.

Whether this were in truth her name, or whether it was but one she had adopted for the purposes of her life in Paris, I could not tell; the people of the place she dwelt in knew, I think, nothing of her. She lived quite alone, and seemed never to seek to hold any sort of social intercourse with any one of those around her.

Only to those who were aged, or such as were in trouble, she was always merciful; with that noble, silent, unceasing charity of action, which so often, amongst the poor, supplies the place of that charity of alms which poverty denies them the power to show to one another.

Herself, she gained a barren living by continual hard toil. She modelled in leather (or, rather, carved the leather as a delicate wood-carver does his wood) for a Palais-Royal house that dealt largely in such things, but paid for them grudgingly.

She did the work marvellously well; she could imitate in it the most perfect wood-carving, a fern-leaf, a dead woodcock, a branch of pine, a water-lily on its green raft of leaves,—she would execute these, or any other similar thing, in leather, until the keenest eye could scarce have told the work from a most delicate and exquisite oak-carving. But it was a slow and toilsome labour; the single feather of a bird would take two hours in its execution—even more; and the wage for them was exceedingly small, beautiful though they were.

She was all day long at this species of sculpture, sitting at the little deal-table, with her tools, under the single small square lattice in the roof: and the life was very dull for me.

There was no sort of change from dawn to sunset. My heart was heavy for all those whom I had lost. It seemed to me that life was but a sequence of tender ties, formed only to be ruptured, and leave the torn heart aching. I missed, moreover, the glad, sweet summer season in the open air; the freedom of the old fruit-gardens and flower-covered ways; the homely, happy sounds of all the stirring bees and chirming birds, of the ducks in the dark cool pond, and the lowing cattle in the poplar-belted meadows.

This little garret was very clean indeed; but it was bare, and dull, and lonesome, exceedingly. The scents of a city made hot and sulphurous the winds that blew in through the lattice; and all the hours through there came up from the streets below the one unceasing muttering of wheels, and cries, and drums, and engines, and all the ceaseless noise of men. It was a quiet ancient quarter, it is true; but the quietest quarter of a city, after the lull of country silence, makes you know all that your poet meant when he wrote of 'the ear that *aches* with sound.'

Of Madelon I never heard.

But once, whilst the boy Rémy was still in the house, and when he took me with him across the bridges to the old green Luxembourg Gardens, as he was wont to do in the pleasant evening time when all Paris was out in the sunset hour, I saw a carriage with scarlet liveries and fretting horses and gay harness all hung with noisy silver bells, and I heard the people round us say to one another, 'There is Cléopâtre.'

And as it went through the white gilded streets and the green lines of leafy trees, and the air that was bright, half with the gleam of the lamps and half with the glare of the sunset, her face came fully in my sight, lit with that evening light, and I knew her then—knew her entirely—as that memory stood out clear and fixed before me, which had haunted me, though vague and troubled, when I had gazed at the picture of Egypt.

Carlos Merle was not with her; beside her sat a dark, slender, gipsy-eyed man, whom the crowds about named, whilst he passed, to one another, as a prince of some Danubian province, fabulously rich, who had lavished on her black sable skins, and diamonds, and opals, and strange Byzantine things of untold worth.

And my heart was sick for Carlos; for it seemed to me that already somewhere in that hot, brilliant, amber-coloured, magnolia-scented summer night, the last rays of the setting sun were seeking out his colourless face and weary body in some haunt of death; while she, the Faustine, the Assassinatress, the Hell-born, was gathering up her skirts, heavy with the golden wage of infamy, and fleeing, with the wicked laugh upon her face, to passion, and to pleasure, and to riotous mirth, and to the witches' sabbath of the senses.

I longed to seek for him. Alas, what could I do? a little powerless, insignificant dog; dragged along with a cord over the asphalte; kicked aside by the hurrying happy throngs that went trooping to theatre and dance-garden; deafened by the music that swelled from the open-air concerts where the soldiers were playing; terrified by the savage glance and word of the gilded and belted gendarmes; and glad to hide, trembling, beneath the chairs of the gay indifferent people who sat before the café doors, and ate their ices, and laughed, and cried, 'Holà, there is Cléopâtre!'

Ah, I wonder if you ever think of the woe that it is to us, that utter inability to serve or to aid those we love!

The life was dreary. To watch the stiff brown sheepskin gradually moulded under the worker's hands into the semblage of some drooping, lifeless, moorland bird, or some lovely curl of clematis-flowers, was all the distraction that I had. I was thankful—since ingratitude is a human monopoly—for my bodily safety, for my corporeal welfare; thankful that I was not beaten, nor starved, nor chained. But I was very sad. I had lost all my friends into the night of an unknown fate; and I could not forget, for I was a dog.

The sole interest that this existence awakened in me was an interest in this woman, who had delivered me from death. I wondered about her ceaselessly.

Her garments were of black, and very worn, but they clung about a form fit for a sculptor's dream of a Greek goddess; her hands were for ever working at the manual toil by which her scanty bread was gained, but they were long and white and slender; her face was very worn and attenuated, as though with infinite want and sorrow, and there were silver threads amongst the luxuriance of her hair; but the shape of her head and throat were haughty and full of stag-like grace, and the eyes were still wondrously beautiful, though the lids were so swollen above, and the shadows were so dark beneath them.

She had a look that was very far above the place in which she dwelt and the poor people of the tenement. Although she lived more poorly still than many of them, and never appeared to hold herself greater in any way, they yet treated her with a curious reverence, and called her Madame with more of courteous meaning than always lies in the common term. I was ashamed to fret at the monotony and obscurity of my own existence, when I saw how utterly joyless and cheerless her days were.

To a woman like this, who must once have been of rare beauty, and who evidently had a proud nature and a delicate taste, the manner of her life must have been almost intolerable. She rose at dawn to go to the little work-table under the lattice; she rarely ate anything save some thin soup, some coffee, and some poor rye bread; she saw no one unless it were some creature yet poorer than her-

self, who came to her door for an aid that she never refused; she rarely went forth save very early, to sell what she had modelled, or to obtain the bough, the fruit or the dead bird that she needed to copy in her dried-skin carving.

I was sometimes with Tambour, the dog in the place below—that little flower-shop of herbs and plants and roses and immortelles, that smelt fragrantly always, and gave a lovely flush of colour in the dark and crowded passage-way; and he told me some few things of her.

He was an old brindled mastiff, very old; so old that he remembered the Days of July, and had seen his first master shot down in his youth upon the barricades; but he was very kind and very pitiful. All our race are. Was it not the dogs that succoured Lazarus, when the rich of his own kind scorned him?

Tambour told me that this woman Reine had dwelt with him three years, coming, he believed, from across the Alps. She had never in all that time lived differently to what she now did; nay, she had indeed lived worse, for at first finding none who would recognise her talent in the leathern carving, nor even purchase sufficient of it to gain her money enough to buy sheepskins and birds for models, she had been forced for some six or seven months to earn her daily bread by the hard course of toil sewing the hempen shirts that the populace wore. Saving a few coins from this ill-paid labour, she had been able at length to obtain the materials which she needed for her art, and had succeeded in obtaining also a market for that art at a shop in the Galérie d'Orléans.

'Why that woman works so I cannot think,' said the old dog to me, where we rested together under the little low ceiling of the flower-shop, among the quantities of broom, and lilies, and roses, and sweet herbs, that lay dying sadly here in the heat and dust and turmoil of the city; flowers sick with longing for the cool touch of the dew, as your hearts get faint with longing for the freshness of truth in the fever and the falsehood of the world. 'I cannot think. Why does she not set a pan of charcoal in her chamber one quiet night, and make an end of all this toil for ever? Julio did that, here in this very house; and he was only twenty. He was a Bordelais; he was a musician; he wrote very beautiful things in music; at least they sounded so upon

his violin, which he would play from dawn to midnight up in that very little garret where you live now with madame. I have seen the people in the street all gathered mute as the dead under our casements, listening—listening, ay, and sobbing like children too. It must have been good music that could move them so? I do not know why it was, but none would listen to it in Paris, save these poor workpeople, out of these courts and alleys, who were, I suppose, no good to him. Any way, I know Paris would not listen; no one would take his opera—not even try it. And they said—my people did—that when he went to one of the great masters, this great man derided him. It might be so: men, you see, will not recognise that all human genius is like all sun-rays, coming from the same source, and therefore the same light whether shining on Europe or Cathay, whether beaming on a king's diamond or on a cotter's tuft of daisies. No; they are so feebly and foolishly jealous. The setting sun denies the sun that rises! Well, Julio could get no hearing; and he was exceeding poor, and the hunger of him killed his soul; and rather than sink down into his soulless, sightless, bitter life, he chose to die. They found him dead one morning—his breath stifled by the fire-fumes, that were kinder than men's neglect. Why does not this woman do the same?'

'Perhaps she thinks it a sin?' I suggested, for I knew that Madelon, or Ben Dare would have held it to be so.

'Perhaps,' assented Tambour. 'It may be one. *We* always endure, you know; we never slay ourselves. Yet it seems strange—how she can go on with that dreary life. All these three years, no friend has ever visited her. No letter has ever come to her. It must be worse than death to be utterly forgotten, to be utterly alone like that. However, I fancy it will not last much longer. That woman is marked to die.'

'To die?'

'Yes; hark at her cough! Look at the flush in those hollow cheeks! See how weak she is when she rises in the morning! She is marked to die, and that soon.'

I shuddered; it seemed terrible.

'You are unwise,' said the old French dog; 'very unwise, if you wish the woman well. What is life to her? A burden borne for duty's sake alone. She will be as glad to

lay it down as a hunted bird is to sink into its nest. There has come a certain peace upon her face of late; I think it has come because she knows death near.'

'But she is young still?'

'Ah, what does that matter? I have seen a girl of seventeen years thankful to die. Her beloved one had been slaughtered in the African raids, and for her the whole world was laid desolate because that one poor soldier was dead in a nameless grave. You do not understand men and women much; they are very curious in that. They are at once the most selfish and unselfish—the most sublime and the most sordid of all created things. See! one of their women will kill her lost lover's fresh mistress rather than let him be happy through another, and then kill herself because she cannot endure to exist without him! There is not the slightest sense in any of their actions; but there are continually the most wonderful egotism, and the most marvellous martyrdom, side by side together.'

'You think the life of Madame Reine a martyrdom.'

'Well, I do. There is the look of a woman who has *renounced* upon her face. It is she who has forsaken the world; not the world that has forsaken her.'

'There is a difference, then?'

'A difference! The poles are not wider asunder. Look you—I was once a convent dog. It was the happiest time of my life. I never went beyond the garden walls it is true; but then it was so large, it was like a little kingdom. I was there six years; years of perfect peace. My only office was to guard the convent fruit from marauding children who would, undaunted by the sanctity of the place, climb the high walls at twilight for sake of the bursting plums and luscious peaches. The nuns made a favourite of me; and I came to know them all perfectly well. The greater number by far were women whom the world had abjured; whom nature, denying beauty, or love, or sweetness, or some other gracious charm of living, had driven to this solitude; or who, disappointed of marriage or ambition, or of whatever desire their souls were set on, had come thither because naught else was possible to them. But again, there were a few whom the world would fain have kept; women gifted, beautiful, victorious, who had been

beloved and tempted; who came of their own will to a self-chosen sacrifice; laying down out of their hands the glory, or the passion, or the homage they enjoyed. Now, of these first women the look was always regret, discontent, sadness, helplessness; but of these latter women it was always half conquest, and half captivity—an agony indeed. And that is the look this woman Reine has on her face; and death with it, as theirs mostly had.'

And then he would compose himself to sleep under the yellow plumes of the broom, and the sheaves of great white lilies, and dream, I doubt not, that he was once more amongst the deep unshaven grasses and the drowsy shadowy ways of his old convent-garden.

This talk of his moved me to quicker and more curious interest than I might otherwise have felt in this lonely, proud, weary woman, who had stood between me and the hangman's cord. There was a strange fascination, too, about her; a fascination that seemed the stronger now that he had shown me that death was hourly stealing the cunning from her hand, and the brilliance from her eyes.

There seemed in that mute, haughty, passionate, colourless face, so eloquent a story of a soul so hard to crush, of hopes so hard to die, of a spirit so hard to break; a story of strong love, of strong powers, of strong woes, of strong will, that had fought so bitter a battle with fate, and at the end been worsted.

It seemed an idle fancy, of a woman who modelled, in a garret, woodcocks and ferns, and wild vine-clusters for the Galérie d'Orléans; yet I could not help believing that she had once been famous in the blaze of the world's light.

Once, one twilight, Tambour and I were lying underneath the lilies; the beautiful pure lilies that the flower-girls bore forth every evening to perish in the gas glare of the streets and cafés, as women take their innocence and honour to wither in the corruption of base sins and venal vices.

There was more stir than usual in the little place that night; there were eager voices, and sobs and laughter, and flushed wondering faces, all pressed together in the light of the little single oil-lamp, whose feeble rays struggled through the dusk of the evening. In the centre of the breathless groups was a girl of one of the adjacent houses. Her name was Mariquità. She was of Cordovan-Jewish

blood, though Paris born, the daughter of a poor fruit-vendor, who dwelt under the tawny leathern awning of the melon and grape-stall opposite.

The girl was handsome, and of a vivacious, electric, untamable temper: she had a voice too, mellow, sweet, far reaching, and a form as lithe as a serpent's.

She stood, the centre of the excited crowd, with her brown arms outstretched, and her whole body quivering beneath her picturesque rags, and her black eyes full of fire, and her white teeth glittering with a hysterical laugh of joy. Evidently some great joy or wonder had just come to her, in which the sympathetic crowd was sharing; for Mariquità, despite her gusts of passion and her lioness-like rags, was a favourite with the people of her quarter, by reason of her beauty and her keen and witty tongue.

As Tambour and I, roused from slumber by their cries and exclamations, lifted our heads and watched them, wondering what had chanced, Madame Reine entered the shop; which was the only passage from the little street without to the staircase of the dwelling which led to the garret which she occupied. She had been out on one of the two only missions which ever took her forth; either the sale of her carvings, to the Galérie d'Orléans, or a visit of charity to some dying or ailing creature.

She paused beside Mariquità, who was, in a manner, favoured even by her; Mariquità, tameless to all others, had ever been docile to her, and had always shown a curious attachment and veneration for her.

'What hast thou, Mariquità?' she asked, arrested by the girl's aspect, and by the excitement of the little throng that filled all the dark den, whose only light came from the colours of dying flowers, as the only poetry of your world comes from the sadness of ruined lives.

The girl flashed her glowing eyes upon the weary face of the woman who questioned her.

'Madame, Madame!' she cried breathlessly, the words coursing each other off her lips. 'Madame! my fortune is made—my fame is made! I shall be great—great, only think! The director of the Ambigu has seen me and has talked with me, and says that I have the genius of Rachel in me, and that if I will serve him, and him only, for five years, he will bring me out before Paris, and make me the

talk of all the world, because I have the three sole things that women want for greatness—beauty, and passion, and voice! O, look! It has come at last,—the chance for Paris to hear me, to see me, to know me. And I have it in me to conquer them; I feel it! I fear nothing, I heed nothing, I hark to nothing—only to this surety in me that tells me I shall be great—great—great!'

She was a ragged Jewish girl; she spoke in the tongue of the populace; she had lived all her short life under the yellow leathern awning, selling the slices of water-melon, and the handful of roast chestnuts, in which her father dealt. But for all that there was the fire of truth in her, and none who heard doubted that her self-prophecy came, not of vanity, but of vision.

Over the face and form of the woman who heard her—of the woman to whom the world was dead—there passed a curious and terrible change. She trembled and recoiled, and seemed to sicken, as one might do who saw the grave of some lost and beloved thing suddenly forced, and flung open, by an alien hand.

'Great, great!' she muttered in her throat, while her eyes gazed, without sight or sense in them, at the dilated triumphant form of the young girl. 'Great! Ah, God! I dreamed just such a dream—once!'

Then, without seeming to have any memory or knowledge of those about her, she moved mechanically forward, and up the familiar stairway into the darkness of the steep and gloomy shaft; away from the rays of the little lamp, away from the fragrance of the fading flowers.

The group around Mariquità looked after her, suddenly checked in their riotous wonder and joyous felicitations; they dimly saw, that in some vague way they had touched and struck the broken chord of this silent life, whose melody was gone for ever.

The young Israelite stood, hushed, and afraid.

'Will it be so with me, ever?' she murmured, and her head sunk on her bosom, and the light died out from her face.

I stole up the stairs into the desolate chamber in the roof, where the woman who had succoured me had passed alone.

In the faint reflection from the sunset in the evening

skies that still lingered here, above, though darkness brooded in the street below, I saw her kneeling as I had seen Madelon kneel in those weary summer nights which had closed the days that had failed to bring her Carlos.

But Madelon's hands had clasped her crucifix: this woman's hands were empty.

From that day her health declined more rapidly and visibly. Her weakness increased, so that she could scarcely move from her chamber. She would drag herself wearily from her bed to the table where her work stood, and strive to model some feather, or leaf, or blossom; and then would let fall the tool she held, and sink down from absolute exhaustion.

She could eat little; and the hard tasteless food she had was ill fitted to tempt appetite. She coughed continually, and her hands were wasted and diaphanous.

It was touching to see the poor people of her quarter bringing some little fruit, a golden peach, or a leaf full of mulberries, and begging her to taste it for their sakes. They had grown to hold her in great reverence and affection, sad, and silent, and proud though her aspect was; and they knew that only for a very little longer could this stranger tarry with them there. To her the young Jewess devoted herself with a passionate attachment: Mariquità seldom spoke, but she would watch for her every want with her great radiant wistful eyes: and would crouch on the floor sleepless and motionless through all the night; and would never tire, or be tempted from her side. Once or twice she brought some clear crystals of ice, some golden luscious wine, some clusters of violet grapes; the dying woman looked at them and murmured some wonder as to whence these costly things could come. Mariquità grew red under her soft brown skin, and muttered hurriedly of gifts made to her father.

But Tambour whispered to me:

'Look you. She has not that golden sequin that she always wore on the silk cord round her throat, the only ornament she had. She has bartered it I doubt not to get the ice and the wine in exchange.'

And neither do I doubt that the girl had done so, though the golden coin had been the pride of her eyes and the delight of her soul; an amulet of potent charm, no less than a jewel of price in her sight.

Mariquità again and again urged her to see some physician. She always refused.

'What use?' she would reply; 'no skill can cure consumption. And if such skill even there were, I would not employ it.'

This was all she ever said in reference to herself, or to the death which she knew to be so near. Usually silent previously, she had sunk now into almost perfect apathy, although the same desolate calm, the same proud serenity, that had always characterised her, were with her still. There was this difference only, that whereas before she had seemed a woman to whom no hope of any sort was possible, she had now 'his one certainty of death which was release. Where the look in her eyes had been agony it was now resignation.

Several months had passed with me here. Autumn was deepening into winter. The only plants in the flower-shop beneath were the immortelles and the wreaths of ivy leaves for tombs. All the rest were pods and seeds, withered foliage, and sheaves of dried herbs, that gave forth a curious faint odour like the scent of herbs that are laid beside the dead in coffins.

Paris around, doubtless, was awakening to its utmost gaiety, its wildest whirl of pleasure; but here we knew nothing of it—we only knew that bread would be dearer, and that the very aged, and the very young, would soon perish of cold, and that wood would be scarce for the stove, and that in the little chamber under the roof there lay a woman dying.

Ah! that is all the poor ever do know of what there is on earth. That there is pain, and there is cold, and there is death.

With other things they have no part nor portion.

And all the while I shivered in the dreary attic that was scarce warmed at all by the little fuel that alone was burnt in it; and pondered ceaselessly and longingly of all those whom I had known and lost; and wondered if in truth I could have ever really been the little gay white creature, happy and playful and prettily proud, that had been caressed by the hands of fair women, and praised by the voices of nobles.

One day, one very chill dark day, in that drear winter-

time I sat huddled beside the bed. The embers had quite died in the stove; the gray December light struggled feebly through the scant inlets of the lattice; the strong scents of the herbs came up the stairs like the odours of sepulchres. Mariquità was perforce absent, gone to her task-master, who was to give her fame as wages. Madame Reine, half raised upon the hard narrow pallet that served her as her couch, had drawn some letters from beneath her pillow, and was reading them—very slowly—one by one.

She had been weaker that day than any heretofore. All the night through convulsions had shaken her wasted form; and the hæmorrhage of the lungs been only stayed by the ice that the Jewish girl had held to her parched lips. Although I had never beheld death, it seemed to me that there could not be many more hours to her life; it seemed that very soon this mute, desolate, proud existence, without a history, without a friend, without a lament, or a sigh of self-pity, must end, and take its secrets and its sorrows to the silence of the grave.

The letters were many, and were hours in her hand; tears had long been scorched dry in her dark weary eyes, but as she read them, one by one, the anguish was upon her face that I had seen on Madelon's when she had heard that her lover dwelt in the house of Cléopâtre.

They were letters in a man's hand; letters doubtless in which a man's heart had been spent in all a man's frank and honest passion.

When the last had been read by her the day was done; the light was well-nigh spent, the evening shadows were long and dark within the chamber. She dragged herself, with slow laborious effort, from her bed to where the scant wood burned in the poor cold stove, and crouched down before it, and slowly thrust one of the letters amongst the fuel.

Her own secret she could take with her to her grave, but his she could not: she would not leave it for another's eyes to learn.

One by one the letters were drawn within the heat and the smoke, and curled, and crumbled, and fell away, a little heap of ashes. And to her it was even as though, with each, her own life consumed and passed away in fire; even as her years had perished in the furnace of the past, so perished these records of a passion that was dead.

They were all her hold on life; all the bonds that still bound her to some old sweet unforgotten time; all the ties that still held her to some divinest season when she had known of joy: all the witness that still told her she also once had lived.

When the last letter alone remained she paused—so long that the cold white moon of winter rose and shone in through the lattice in the roof. She waited, as the suicide may wait ere he drives home the thrust that shall still memory in him for ever, and make him dumb, and kill, and senseless, as the earth that will yawn open to receive his corpse.

It was quite night, the moon was high and full, and the chamber was dark as a grave, when at last she stretched out her hand and let the cruel fire take those living, breathing, throbbing words of a love that wrote itself as deathless; and burn them, as time burns passion till it dies; and leave them there, a little coil of wind-blown, silent, hueless ashes.

Then, as though her own life indeed went out with theirs her hands moved feebly as though seeking some other hand to hold them; her great dark eyes gazed upward as though searching for some other look in answer; a convulsive shudder moved her once—only once—then stretching her arms out wearily, in the darkness and the solitude and the silence of the night, she bowed her head and died.

CHAPTER XXX.

A TORN LETTER.

They buried her in the quarter of the poor. They had loved her, these people, and they would not leave her in her death to chance, or charity. They did what they could to honour her in her grave; and the Jewish girl, weeping passionately, and refusing to be comforted, laid on that nameless grave the earliest white-ladies that bloomed, pure and spotless out of the winter-snows.

Amongst the trifles of her daily work, of the art that she

had prosecuted, they found a written fragment in her hand-writing, a sheet of paper torn obliquely, seeming to be a letter that she had penned upon her dying bed, and then had half-destroyed, in doubt whether or no to leave it to speak for her to some other when her voice should be for ever silent.

The fragment was this—many words propably had preceded it.

'It is selfish to send you this; when I am dead it can but rend your heart, if your heart still holds a place for me. And yet I feel that I must write to you this one last word, —must bid you know why, why only, I fled from you. O God, you cannot doubt why it was, surely!

'I left all, I lost all, when I gave up the world for you. I had vanquished them; I had vindicated my own powers. I had reached success, if not fame; I had talents, if not genius; I had touched celebrity and brilliancy, and wealth and pleasure; I had learnt how sweet the praise of the world can be; I had tasted how precious is the homage of watching eyes and listening ears: and I gave it up all—all —for you. Only for you. It was not my duty as a wife, he had forfeited all claim to it. It was not my honour as a woman, you were dearer to me than that. It was neither of those that made me leave you to think me dead so long. No: it was for your sake alone.

'It seems such a little thing for a woman to give her life up to love; and it is little, truly, so little that do you think I should have paused one moment out of selfish fear? But it is a great thing for a man—a terrible thing;—a thing not less than ruin.

'You and I have known the world—have we seen any fate less deadly to a man than that surrender of himself to the wife of another, in a union that has all the bondage, and none of the honour, of marriage? And the sweeter, the truer, the more loyal the man's nature, the worse is the bondage for him.

'It was not because I doubted you that I dared not become your mistress: it was because I trusted you so utterly. You loved me with such noble and perfect love; you would have surrendered your life to mine as indemnity

for what you would have thought my sacrifice; you would have held that the world's scorn gave me upon you a claim fast as iron, imperishable, eternal. You would never more have been free! and I—I, O my love! should have been your gaoler, your injurer, your curse.

'I had strength to save you from myself—from yourself; to set my will for your sake between your passion and my own . . . . Will you understand this? you must at least believe. Since for it I have lost all.

'Do not seek to learn how have I lived: it has been by simple hand-labour alone.

'The mock passions, the counterfeit woes, the mimicked embraces of the stage seemed profanation to me when once you had looked into my eyes. Moreover, had I remained before the world, I could not have been withdrawn from your sight, your voice, your presence; and women are so weak, I could not have been sure an hour of my strength.

'It was for you—for you alone. I knew so well the loyal knightly sweetness of your nature; I knew so well that you would have deemed yourself mine till death: I knew so well how it would have ended—the old, old history!—when some higher, happier, purer love should have arisen to you, and I—your mistress—should have stood between you and all fair things of innocence and honour.

'Will you believe?—My God! you *must!* For you I have bore worse than death;—for you I have killed myself in my youth, my beauty, my power, my victory;—for you I have died, and yet have kept the agony of life awake in me; yet in my grave have I heard the laughter of the happy world, and all the glad and busy sounds of earth. Will ever woman love you as I have loved! No—never, never, never! . . . .'

There the words ceased, and the paper was torn asunder, as though, when she had written these, she had feared to send them to him lest in them she should leave a legacy of pain, lest by them she should deal the stroke that she so long had spared, lest through them any sort of selfish pity, any breath of unconscious rebuke, should seem to him to linger in her dying memory of him.

Mariquità took the torn sheet, and caused it to be read aloud to her by some Jew of the quarter who understood the English character in which it had been penned. She heard it with wonderful eyes, all ablaze with fire, and yet all dimmed with tears; then she folded the paper reverently, and laid it within a little curious leathern locket that she owned; and thrust it within her bosom.

'Some day I may meet him,' she muttered to herself; and she went on her way with the first snowdrops of the year to that nameless grave in the quarter of the poor.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CHILD GLADYS.

For a brief space afterwards I remained in the little flower-shop. Mariquità vehemently implored for permission to possess herself of me, entreating, and commanding, and execrating, and conjuring all in one breath, in her own impetuous volcanic fashion, but all her prayers were useless. The time had not come for her to have entered on the career that looked to her the high road of glory and affluence; she was exceedingly poor; and she had nothing to offer for me save a few old battered centime pieces. The florist shrugged his shoulders and answered that I was of value; that he had a right to me, as his dead lodger had cost him more than she had paid (this I am certain was untrue), and that he should keep me until he could make an advantageous sale. All the low cunning and the hungry avarice of the low French nature had awakened in him, without any other counteracting influence to combat it, now that the one woman was gone towards whom he had felt forced to yield a certain reverent submission. So I remained; dull, weary, spiritless, ill fed, ill cared for; knowing no moments of pleasure except when the Jewish girl would beg me for an hour, and warm me beside the little stove at which her father roasted his sweet chestnuts, and sit with me under the broad old red weather-stained

umbrella that in winter replaced the tawny awning of spring and summer. But these times were few and far between, for Mariquità went now daily to the theatre, at which she was to acquire the rudimentary grace and science of that Art which, as seen in her marvellous visions, was to make her meet with the empresses of the earth.

I did not seek to run away, though I was miserable. I had acquired that sad knowledge which the young are so rebellious against—that there are things worse even than a dreary and desolate monotony. I had known the lash, the goad, the life of the public toy, the endless labour of an ever-renewing task; and I knew that there were worse fates than to see the days and the nights drift dully by, sitting amongst the stores of evergreens and the pale winter roses, even as men and women, when their life is done, sit amidst deathless memories and faint sickly hopes.

Awhile earlier I should have rebelled passionately against this colourless and weary existence; but now I knew that not actively to suffer is almost, in this life we lead, the nearest approach we get to joy. So I took the broken crusts and the begrudged shelter, and the chilly hearth where the stove was cold; and tried hard to be thankful because the snow-flakes could not cover me, and the hail could not pelt me, and the shivering mountebanks, who came into the quarter of the poor to dance on the icy ground and to shake their spangles in the blue hard frost, could not seize me as a brother and claim me as a slave.

'Ah, little one! shall we ever *live*, thou and I?' cried Mariquità to me one day, rebelling in her wayward youth against the poor barren life of hardship and of solitude that she led at her father's fruit stall. She might, I knew—for she was a woman, and beautiful, and to such the apple of life will ever be tossed if they do not mind the black speck at its core of dishonour. But to me it seemed that never more could mirth or joy return.

Yet, as often chances, I think, in this life, both were nearest to me when I deemed them farthest. The time came when the old man sold me—sold me just as the new year began. I was now so sick at heart, so tired, and so homeless, that indeed I cared little whither I went, nor what my fate might be. Only I dreaded with a terror untold, the stick of Già and the little red coat of La Pipetta.

There were the usual chaffering of strange voices; some broken weeks of unrest and captivity; some misery in strange hands and binding chains; some piteous, dumb, wondering woe, that none seemed to note or care for; then there came a day of travel by land and sea, and when my cage was opened and I was loosed from it with eyes blinded by the rush of light, and senses half numbed and half maddened, I thought that I was dreaming a dream of my old dead life.

The chamber was strangely familiar. The place seemed to me like 'a tale that is twice told.'

Its cabinets, its bookcases, its mirrors on their ground of ruby velvet, its grand piano in a half-lit recess, its single small marble statuette of the 'Gott und der Bayadere,' its exquisite copy of the 'Départ pour Cythère,' hung between photographs of Rachael and Ristori: did I dream of these in one of the many dreams of them which had haunted me among the long dry Campagna grasses, under the orchard-trees of the Silver Stag, and amongst the white lilies and yellow broom of the flower-shop in Paris? Or was I, in truth, once more in the supper-room of the Coronet? The door had closed behind me; I was alone, I gazed around in eagerness and amaze.

There behind the bookcase-glass were the cream-hued faces of Scribe and all his brethren; there on the couch were the sealskins, and the black laces, and the painted fan of a woman; there on the table were the Majolica fruit-stands that I knew so well, and the little silver wagon that held the cigarettes, and the claret-jugs with their swan-like necks, and the quaint old flasks of Rhineland wine. Yes, surely, it was no dream. I was once more, after my wanderings, in the pleasant festal-chamber of the unforgotten theatre; I was once more in the old charming life of ease and fashion, where the wheels of time were oiled with gold, and if Care still clung behind, Pleasure at the least ran on before.

And I felt half blind with joy.

For, write as you will of the glory of poverty, and of the ennui of pleasure, there is no life like this life, wherein to the sight and the sense all things minister; wherefrom harsh discord and all unloveliness are banished; where the rare beauty of high-born women is common; where the

passions at their wildest still sheathe themselves in courtesy's silver scabbard; where the daily habits of existence are made graceful and artistic; where grief and woe, and feud, and futile longing for lost loves, can easiest be forgot in delicate laughter and in endless change. Artificial? Ah, well, it may be so! But since nevermore will you return to the life of the savage, to the wigwam of the squaw, it is best, methinks, that the Art of Living—the great *Savoir Vivre*—should be brought, as you seek to bring all other arts, up to uttermost perfection.

I sat down, and gazed around me in a tumult of memory and of expectation. It was very still, except for the roll of the carriages in the street below. In this room you never, at any time, would hear one sound to tell you that an audience of three thousand people was shouting with applause, or shrieking with mirth, only a few feet beyond.

In this strange silence—strange because such intensity of life was so near—I thought, I knew not why, of the boy-statesman who had killed himself upon the hearth of this very chamber, to have his jewels rifled, even whilst she kissed his dead lips, by the woman for whom he perished.

Was it always thus, I wondered? Always the love, and the loyalty and the faithfulness that suffered; and all that lived in peace and plenteousness the Faustine—the Cléopâtre?

As I mused the door opened, and a woman entered.

Have you never seen in life or on some old master's canvas, a beautiful child's face, fair, tender, serious even to sadness, with the golden hair cut low and square over the brow, and the dreaming eyes gazing straightly out beyond you, very far beyond you? If you have, you have seen this woman's face as she came into the lighted chamber, with black folds of velvet sweeping after her as she moved, with that grave grace of motion which always seems to belong to other centuries—to the terraces of Marly, to the halls of Rambouillet, to the studios of Vandyke, to the palaces of Charles the First. And which you have lost—yes, lost strangely, in this day of yours, when, all lovely and thoroughbred though many of your women be, they smoke their paper cigarettes, and talk their stolen slang, bet on their gunners in a drove of grouse, and land their gasping grilse to their own line; take a double and drop like a workwoman,

and 'get on' for a 'good thing' at the Craven or the July, with a reckless audacity that never flies at anything less than four figures.

She looked at me with a smile which seemed, I thought, surety that I should have to endure from her neither harshness nor caprice.

'What a pretty creature!' she said as she stooped to touch me; but I stayed not for her caress—I forgot her very presence, for beyond her I saw Beltran.

Time had not dimmed my memory of him, nor had it quenched my affection. With a bark of delight, I escaped through her hands and sprang on him, recalling myself to his remembrance with all the innocent arts of which I was master. He was in nowise altered; but had he been so ever so greatly, my instinct would have been true to him.

We, who can only love dumbly, cling to the creature of our affections, no matter how time have blanched his locks, bowed his frame, shattered his whole being. You, who talk so grandly of elective affinities and the unions of souls, pass your early love in the street without knowing her, if she have but wrinkled a little; and break off your marriage troth with your lover if a shower of shot chance to change his handsome face to deformity.

He looked at me in my ecstasies with amused surprise; he had no sort of knowledge of me; but as he turned to her to speak of my value, the little collar that I wore caught his sight, and he raised me to read the inscription upon it.

The bit of metal that had been fashioned for me at the forge in the woods of the Peak was still about my throat; it was not worth a brass coin, so none had cared to rob me of it.

If you wish to keep a thing, let it have naught to attract the eyes of others—a rule which sometimes seems to influence you too often in the selection of your wives

His face changed as he read.

'Puck!' he muttered; 'as I live, it is the same dog that belonged—'

The phrase was left unfinished; the woman beside him turned with a flush of surprise, in which one saw how very youthful was that lovely face.

'Puck! Puck!' she echoed, as though my name brought

also to her some memories. 'Can it be the same? That is strange, indeed!'

'It is the same dog, oddly enough,' said Beltran, as he gave me to her; but there was an annoyance, almost a displeasure on his face as he spoke. Whatever might be her remembrance of me—for of her I had none—to him evidently I bore but one association, and that the unwelcome one of Avice Dare. For me personally, I suppose, he cared nothing. Alas for us! it is almost ever so in the intercourse between our race and yours. Between human beings, when two measures of love are weighed out by the hand of fate, to be mingled together in union, one scale is always light and the other always heavy. How much more so between men and dogs!

Although we spend all that we possess of loyalty and strength and courage in human service, and break our hearts oftentimes for human friends, we are seldom much loved in return. A careless touch of the hand, a rough kindly word or two now and then, a broken crust, a tossed bone: these are payments enough for a dog—'only a dog.'

Here and there a Rab will find a chronicler; a St. John will beg with his last breath that his bones be laid beside Lion's; a Byron will value his 'one friend;' a Walter Scott will think, amidst woe, and debt, and the exhaustion of a mortal disease, of 'the dogs;' and tombs will be raised to lost and lamented dog-comrades, as in the little shadowy yew-circled cemetry of Wrest. But these exceptions are very rare. For the most part, we are but little loved, little heeded, and not at all remembered.

The woman, bending over me, caressed me with a dreamy tenderness, as though thinking of other things that my presence brought from some past time. Her eyes seemed dim as she looked at me with a sweet vague sadness, as for some remembered season of great woe. Beltran drew me away from her.

'If he bring you those memories, he shall not stay. I would never have bought him if I had known—'

'Why?' she answered him, still dreamily. 'I shall care more for him. As for those memories,—when do I ever forget them? And do you think I would forget if I could?'

'I wish that you would at least. There is only one thing you can want to remember—'

'And what is that?'

'That you are famous now—and happy. You *are* happy?'

There seemed, I thought, some little doubt and vague apprehension in his question.

If there were, they must have been contented by the look in her eyes as they turned on him: a look so eloquent that it needed not in its confirmation the half-sigh of joy with which her lips breathed the answer.

'Happy? Ah, yes! Happier than it can ever seem right to me to be—'

He did not ask her why this should be so,—perhaps he knew.

Almost at that moment the door of the supper-room, which they had left open to the passages beyond, was filled by the forms of five other men: three were strangers to me; in the two others I recognised the fair features of Lord Guilliadene, and the lofty form and dark guerrilla-like head of Derry Denzil. To me it seemed so marvellously strange, so breathlessly bewildering, thus to be tossed back once more by the battledore of chance into the heart of these old associations and unforgotten memories that I cowered, dumb and dizzy, in a corner, wondering still if I were not dreaming all these things under the dying lilies of the florist's little den, or the golden-fruited pear-trees of Madelon's orchard.

But, with them, there appeared a presence which did assure me beyond all doubt or question that I was in the region of fact and not of fancy; for into the chamber there entered a little black slender figure, hung about with golden bells, with piercing eyes, diamond bright, and a pert, proud, consequential carriage. Need I say it was Fanfreluche?

She darted at me, angered, curious, brimful of irritation, and readiness for insolence; then dropped her nose to mine, and cocked her ears, and screamed 'Mercy! if it's not that little fool!'

The salutation was not courtly nor complimentary; yet it fell sweetly upon my ears. Is not the roughness, or the sarcasm, of a friend more welcome than the sauve insincerity of conventionality-clothed foes? It is so to us: not perhaps to you; for humanity has learnt to love a daintily-dressed falsehood. What matter to you if garden snails, pulled off the cabbages, have made your soup, so long as

you don't know it; and are cheated by a clever cook into murmuring, 'What a good *consommé!*'

Fanfreluche knew me, instantly; and was glad to see me, with that warmth of heart which had always underlain her cynical assumptions. Quickly, as though we had never parted, we were talking fast in that tongue of ours, which you understand as little as you—deaf in your own conceit—understand what the rooks talk to one another in the sweet still evening time; or know the meaning of the night-birds' signals, as they move in the world of shadows; or catch the word of warning with which the blackcock, on his tussock of heather, tells his brethren of the rifle-gleam; or comprehend the coquetries of the prairie fowl's quaint ceremonious country-dances; or know by what rule of command and subjection the great armies of porpoises move with such precision and wisdom; or tell what amorous poetry the stock-dove murmurs to her mates through the sweet green summer silence; or translate any other of the innumerable tongues that daily and nightly fill the woods and waters, the meadows and seas, with their meaning. A meaning to the full as intelligible and as useful as that of your own speech; only you are too vain to believe it, and too limited indeed in your intelligences to be able to do so much as perceive it.*

'Where on earth have you been all these years?' began Fanfreluche, showing the passage of the years herself no more than does your 'frisky matron.' 'And you look as much of a baby as ever you did, you poor little atom of swansdown!'

This was insolent, for I was treble her size, but I was too content to meet her once more, to pause to vindicate my dignity; and indeed she gave me no time to do so, nor any peace, until I had related to her all my vicissitudes from the period of my disappearance. For them she evinced some compassion, and more contempt: as I believe your friends are in the habit of doing when you tell them how your wife has gone wrong, your bank broken, your horse

* I hope a certain contemptuous tone of self-glorification, that runs throughout will be forgiven to my friend Puck. It is perhaps pardonable when we reflect that his race always smell out a rogue, however, he may be clothed; and that we seldom or never detect one provided only he be, as the French say of their *abricots, très bien doré.*—Ed.

proved a non-stayer, your pigeon fallen outside the enclosure, or any other misfortune of your existence.

'I am sorry you have ever been professional,' she said disdainfully, when she had heard of the days of La Pipetta. 'You haven't lost caste. We don't: a thoroughbred's always a thoroughbred, if he come down to drawing a cart. But the stage never suits us. It suits *them*. Human beings are always acting off the boards; they may just as well do it on; a lie or two more or less, when they are about it, doesn't matter much. But we—'

'Tell me all about yourself. What have you done?' I interrupted her, remembering of her old disposition to chatter epigram, or what she thought was such, with about as much reason as your ignorant diner will take a bit of mutton, smothered in sauce, to be an *epigramme d'agneau*.

'Done!' she echoed. '*I?* My dear, I should talk all night if I attempted to tell you. You've lived in a puppet-box, an *auberge*, and an attic. I've lived with one duchess, one marchioness, three Anonymas, a rector's wife, a horse-couper, an ambassadress, a tinker, and a manufacturer of truffles—india-rubber, and so true to life that nobody but a dog could have told the difference; people went into ecstasies over their flavour! Done? Why, it's an eternity since I saw you! A bride whom I was bought for when you went off the scene—such a pretty creature, and quite a love match!—has had time to get into the "Court of Probate, etc.," and out again, and is just going to marry her lover. By the way, I saw her throw her arms round her husband, and kiss him with her pretty innocent lips, the very night she ran off with the other one from old Lady Tynemouth's "small and early." O! those dear women!

'And what became of the husband?'

'How out of fashion you are, thinking of *him*—that comes of living in puppet-boxes and garrets. O, he went mad, I believe: is mad now. A fine, gallant-looking fellow, too; but I knew from the first he was a great fool: he always preferred sweet champagnes, and never could eat a raw oyster.'

'But tell me all that has happened here?' I urged, breathless and curious, as I gazed at the familiar faces, and the familiar things, and heard Beltran's slow melodious contemptuous tones, and Denzil's deep frank laughter.

'Has he restored the theatre? And who is that lovely woman?'

'That lovely woman you will know more about than I,—for you are going to live with her, I believe. He restored the theatre, at a ruinous cost, directly after it was wrecked, partly because, out of kindliness, he wouldn't turn his employés adrift in mid-winter; and partly out of pride, because he wouldn't have the town say that the success of his stage depended on Laura Pearl, or Avice Dare as you used to call her—'

'And she is in Paris? She is Cléopâtre?' I demanded, scarce able still to disentagle past from present, dream from fact.

'She is Cléopâtre—just now—yes,' assented Fanfreluche: 'what she'll be before she dies nobody on earth can say—a peeress, or a princess, I shouldn't wonder. That woman understands the great rule of success—"*frappez vite, et frappez fort*"—and don't care a hang where you strike. I was in Paris all last winter, and I thought she was having a very good time, as the Americans say: she spent her thousand francs a day; she had peaches before anybody else, she changed her dress four times in every twelve hours, she had the best horses in the Bois, the Court wore a robe Watteau she had revived, a new liqueur was christened after her, and tortoiseshell fans became the rage because she carried one. I don't know what a woman wants besides all this to be in paradise!'

I shuddered. I thought of Carlos.

That history seemed too terrible to speak of to this gay satirist.

'What are you thinking about? You are not the livelier for your exile,' cried Fanfreluche. 'Ah, my dear, you should have lived as I've done; with men who make up delicious truffles out of a little india-rubber, and women who make up lovely faces with dead hair and their paint-boxes! They are the comedy of life. You've been with people dreadfully in earnest, who ate dry bread, and wore their own hair, and looked sallow with sorrow, and did no end of fool's things, and went through life as through a tragedy—I know! There can't be a greater mistake. Everything is amusing, if you'll only look at it in that light.'

'Life has gone so well with you,' I retorted.

'O, well enough, my dear! And why? I bite everybody's legs if I'm unhappy; you should see how quick they get to make me comfortable! The secret of being happy yourself lies in the capacity to be intensely disagreeable to other people.'

'That sounds very unamiable.'

'Unamiable! what does that matter? An amiable dog is a fool—every little cur in the streets snarls in his path, and every scamp of a boy throws stones at him!'

'But his own people love him?'

'O yes, love him so dearly that they give him a sound kick in the ribs—knowing he won't return it!'

I thought she had grown soured by growing older, female creatures will; or at least on our ear, a *mot*, that only sounds prettily piquant when the speakers are young, has a spiteful ring in its tone, we fancy, when they are young no longer. Indeed, these sharp trivialities annoyed me at this moment, when I was all agitation and excitement at my sudden return, and full of eagerness as to all that had happened in this little world during the dreary seasons that I had been absent from it.

'We are just the same as we always were, my dear,' she said pettishly. 'Bless you! in our world we never alter anything; our hearts may be broken, our honour be blasted, our peace gone for ever, the one friend we trusted dead, the one woman we cared for lost, we never change anything; we dine and drive, and smoke and saunter, and laugh and drink, and make love just the same. Why not? Our one canon is, not to show that we're beat. *Beau joueur ne faut se plaindre.*'

'It must be hard to do that sometimes.'

'It is hard to the canaille; it is second nature to the gentleman,' retorted this determined aristocrat. 'If you want news, of course we have always plenty of that. No end of marriages and divorces, and scandals, and turf-ruin, and cocotte-ruin, and all the rest of it; there are fresh stories every day, just as there's fresh butter for breakfast. But nothing makes much difference—nothing—unless perhaps it's the grouse disease.'

'The grouse disease!'

'Well, yes, there's nothing exactly to put in those birds' places; but men and women get supplied quite as fast as

they get bowled over. "Durham's gone," they were saying last autumn everywhere; and he was "gone" for some four hundred thousand; nothing in the world left him except his bare title; for Royeldene wasn't entailed. Now, Sir D'Arcy Durham—you remember him?—was, take him all in all, the best-loved man in the country; witty, sweet-tempered, generous to madness, brilliant exceedingly, he was yet of happy enough nature to have scarcely an enemy, and to be adored nearly as much by man as by woman. Well—who thinks of him now? He's ruined and has gone to Norway, or—no one knows where. "Durham would have handled these line hunters better than that d—d fool;" or "Durham wouldn't have squandered a fine lot of foxes like this duffer," they have said now and then when wrathful with some M. F. H. And that's all; except that two or three women have looked white, for a month or two, in spite of their rouge.'

'Do hold your tongue,' I entreated; 'or else tell me why I am here, and what has happened to them all, and who is that beautiful fair woman.'

'As to why you are here I don't know. Simply, I believe because Beltran wanted a dog of your sort, and bade some fanciers look out for one; in consequence of which you were sent him. No design, my dear; nothing but coincidence—the one odd-tempered deity that rules the world. When those poor devils of novelists jumble a lot of impossible coincidences all pell-mell together without building plan or sequence, or any sort of sense, they are all wrong as to Art, clearly, but they are awfully true to life. As to them—as I tell you, nothing makes much difference to them. They've dined, and dressed, and shot, and hunted, and played whist, and made love, much the same as ever they did. They're always saying they're tired of the life, but I don't think they can be, for they never seem to try any other. Beltran's been to Africa and killed a lot of things; and a mare of Guilliadene's won the Oaks, spread-eagling in splendid style all her field, though the very merest outsider; and Derry Denzil's published another book that the men swore by in the smoking-rooms, and the women cried over, and the critics called immoral, so that I suppose it was a great success with three such vouchers for it. *Du reste*—I don't think there's much to tell. There's been plenty of news,

of course; but now-a-days, when nobody ever takes up a paper without seeing some friend or another divorced, bankrupt, breaking a bank, or writing a novel, no news seems to have much taste in it—your *bombe* is all water-ice.'

'But the theatre?' I persisted, out of patience.

'O, the theatre is doing wonders, they say, since this new miracle came into it. All the cellar-flaps done away with, you know, my dear, we go in for nothing but high art, or at least as nearly high as is possible in an age that prefers high feeding.'

'But who is *she?*'

'I can't say. Our stars are seldom lost Pleiades that can be named and placed: they are generally "*étoiles qui filent—qui filent—qui filent et disparaissent!*" You are going to live with her. You can't want to ask me.'

'And where do you live?'

'With Beltran.'

I could not repress a sigh of envy and of sorrow; my pleasant place in those pleasant chambers! Nothing looks so sweet to us as a lost home in which a stranger is installed. The flaming sword, betwixt the infuriate cherubim of the brazen gates, was more merciful by far to the Eden-banished sinners than would have been the sight of other human creatures sunned in the lost light of that fair forbidden kingdom.

'You are fortunate,' I said with a sharp pang.

'I don't know about that, my dear,' she made answer. 'I suppose I am. I have always made it a practice to pilfer anything that looks tempting, and bite everything weaker than myself that I meet with; I believe that is the sort of practice that makes men's fortunes, so it ought to make ours. I wished to live with Beltran, so last season I just walked into his rooms and stopped there. They couldn't get me to go out, do all they would; so they ended by making themselves agreeable to my staying. If you want to get a place, try that way. I've seen so many public men keep in offices, that everybody wanted to turn them out of, only by that power of theirs of sticking tight, as a sea anemone sticks to its rock! "A masterly inactivity" is never so masterly as when it glues you fast to a good berth, no matter whether you're fit or unfit for it. They understand that so well in all cabinets!'

'You must know everything about him, then?'

She turned her nose in the air.

'My dear! There are four orders of creatures that always know everything—they are journalists, ladies'-maids, priests, and toy terriers.'

And therewith she left me in the half-lit recess where the grand piano stood, and trotted out into the full light, where she put herself into a pretty pose in order to get bonbons thrown to her.

Whilst she was gleefully catching the burnt almonds and crystallised cherries, and cracking them with a monkey-like unction, I sat in my corner, not knowing rightly yet whether I were awake or dreaming.

The very familiarity of the aspect of all around me only increased the confusion of my ideas. There was nothing but what I had dreamily remembered, a score of times, in the visions which had visited me lying under a *contadino's* tent in the harvest-fields of the Campagna, or watching the pale moon glide above the metal roofs of Paris; nothing except the picturesque head of this beautiful fair woman, the like of which I have never seen either in life or dreams. I sat still and gazed at them; gazed beyond all at Beltran. Having so long beheld nothing but the passionate, black-browed, sun-bronzed faces of the Roman peasantry, and the lean, swart, keen, eager visage of the Parisian workmen—save when I had seen the golden beauty and fervid youth of the painter Carlos—these men, once so familiar to me, with their handsome colourless faces, their low serene voices, their tired laughter, their look of fatigue, their consummate tranquillity and indifference, seemed like the creatures of another world.

Could passion stir them? pain move them? want consume them? life be known to them through any other thing save its pleasures and satieties? Idly I wondered this, judging foolishly from the surface. I might have known that no passions burn fiercer, no romances wax stronger, no courage ever flames higher, and no hearts perchance ache more wearily, than in these lives that look so passionless, so tranquil, so cynical, so selfish, and, as your world will have it, so culpable.

If you doubt what these men are whilst you see them live, go and see them die, as they have died again and

again, at Steinkerk, at Edgehill, at Vittoria, at Hougoumont, at Inkermann. Jacques Bonhomme shrieked and struggled, and writhed and screamed, as they led him to the scaffold; but think you that Rohan cared nothing for the sweetness of life because the proud blood never paled before the axe, and the mute lips never once lost that smile of serenest disdain?

I cannot tell why these disjointed thoughts drifted vaguely through my mind as I looked at Beltran, even in that moment of bewilderment and of restoration. Except, indeed, that in the faces of men like himself, as they lie at length on the heather, or pace their yacht-deck, or smoke their cigar on a battle-field, or murmur love-nonsense in an opera-box, you can trace the old *race* so curiously. The old race with all its reckless daring, and its feudal insolence, and its courtly gentleness, and its imperious temper, and its loyal honour, and its simple religion of *noblesse oblige*, still alive under all the changes of manner and habit; the old race, which is still, whatever be its faults or follies, what a mob will cower before, and a soldier will follow to the death, and a people will look to in its hours of action or of need, and a woman will choose before any other type of manhood to be beside her in any time of menace or of peril.

From my dusky corner, I watched, and wondered, and listened, and puzzled my brain: the room was the same, the men were the same, Fanfreluche was the same, the very silver box that held the cigarettes was the same, and yet—there was a great difference. The voices seemed much gentler; the laughter seemed much quieter; the wines were but little touched; the conversation, as I caught snatches of it, seemed artistic, pleasant, sometimes playful, sometimes earnest, but at all times the conversation of men, talking at their ease indeed, but still troubling themselves to talk ably, and conscious of the presence of a woman who could discern such ability. Above all, their speech was fit for a delicate ear even in their sharpest witticisms, and there was not a flavour of that cynical indecency which had been so general to the same speakers here in the days of Avice Dare.

What had wrought the difference I wondered? Certainly she who now sat there, with that fair, childlike, and yet

queenlike head, and those dreaming, luminous, grave eyes, and that voice which made the simplest words of common speech sound music, and that rich old-world velvet dress without a single jewel or ornament of any sort, was very different to the form that I had used to see there; blazing in sapphires or in rubies, and full of the supreme vanity of its own wanton, deep-hued, gorgeous, physical perfections displayed to the eyes of others, as the peacock spreads its plumage to the sun.

Men are very much in society as women will them to be. Let a woman's society be composed of men gently-born and bred, and if she find them either coarse or stupid, make answer to her:—'You must have been coarse or stupid yourself.'

And if she demur to the *tu quoque* as to a base and illogical form of argument, which we will grant that it usually is, remind her that the cream of a pasturage may be pure and rich, but if it pass into the hands of a clumsy farm serving-maid, then shall the cheese made thereof be neither Roquefort nor Stilton, but rough and flavourless and uneatable, 'like a Banbury cheese, nothing but paring.'* Now, the influence of a woman's intelligence on the male intellects about her is as the churn to the cream: it can either enrich and utilise it, or impoverish and waste it. It is not too much to say that it almost invariably, in the present decadence of the salon and parrot-jabbering of the suffrage, has the latter effect alone.

'Pray tell me who this exquisite creature is? I begged of Fanfreluche, who returned to me when she had eaten at her own sweet will of bonbons till she was tired of them.

'You'll hear enough of her, my dear,' she retorted; 'the town talks of her, and crowds this place to see her. She does act well, that I grant; but if she only knew it, she don't want her genius a bit; she might act like a stick; they'd come just the same,—once set going.'

'But to set them going requires the genius?'

'Gracious, no!' returned my ancient monitress, with unutterable contempt. 'If you can just get it well bruited about that a woman's very pretty, or very immoral, or has tried to poison some people, or has got fabulously little

* Jack Drum's Entertainment, 1601.—Ed.

feet, or is going to play a shockingly scandalous character, any of these things will draw a great deal better than any amount of talent. What made this one's fame? Not her capabilities, though they are great; but just this one line in the *Midas*—"She is the loveliest woman we have ever seen upon this or upon any other stage, and her attire is simply—perfection." The men went to see the face, the women to see the dress: her fortune was made. *Voilà*!'

'She is a great actress, then?'

'She is a charming actress. I don't think we can have a great one. We are not barbaric enough; and we are too incredulous. You want a good deal of barbarism and a good deal of faith in an age, to get a really great stage out of it. To us, after our late dinners and with our pleasant indolent spleen, Lady Macbeth looks ridiculous, and Othello seems very bad form. We are as wicked as ever other ages were, as passionate and as vile and as guilty as ever they were; but it is all in a very different fashion: and the fashion is one which it is much easier for the satirist to deal with pungently than it is for the dramatist to render artistically. Chignons, and co-respondents, plunging and panniers, Americanism and cocotteism, are so much better suited to a Sheridan or Beaumarchais, than to a Shakespeare or a Sophocles. The odd thing is that, in the dearth of the poetic drama, not one satirical comedy has as yet held up the mirror to all that tempts such a mirror so strongly. The odd thing is that, with such a field for them we have no Sheridan, and no Beaumarchais.'

'I did not ask for a dissertation on the drama,' I interrupted her impatiently. 'I want to know about this woman.'

'I'll tell you all I know, my dear,' said Fanfreluche, seating herself comfortably. 'You remember the wreck of the theatre, of course?—Well, he restored it, as fresh and pretty and dainty as any enamelled *bonbonnière*. It is nicer than ever it was, with statuettes in its corridors, and little boudoirs behind its choicest boxes, and leaves and flowers everywhere. It cost enormously; but he did it chiefly out of pride, no doubt, that none might say the house had depended on Laura Pearl. Many persons wanted it: when a thing or a woman is known to be certain ruin it is always bid for so eagerly! But Beltran

would not part with it. "I shall chance it till the lease is ended," he always answered; and the time came when I thought I knew why he had so answered.

'The performance was much the same for a time: Maude Delamere and melodramas first; burlesque and ballet afterwards. Money was lost every night. I don't know why; I suppose old Wynch did. The losses were so profitable to him that he retired, bought a small place in Surrey, and lives at ease. Last autumn twelvemonth I belonged to Mrs. Riversleigh—pretty; notorious; husband vaguely "in the city;" good for water-parties, fish-dinners, drag seats; and doesn't resent being cut if you meet her in the Park when you're driving with your wife or your mother: you know the style I mean? Royston Wressyl was her chief friend at that time: a Major of Lancers in the old Sixteenth. She was in town because the Sixteenth were at Hounslow. One night Wressyl and she went to the Coronet with a few others; they were to sup at the Leviathan afterwards; and to take me with them for a wager, which they did. Wressyl carried me hidden in a big lorgnon case; but he needn't have troubled himself, they knew me there.

'"What do they play to-night, Royston?" she asked as we drove.

'"I'm not sure," he answered her, "but I'm awfully afraid it's some old duffer's dry-as-dust play. They were saying something to-day, though, in the Rag, about a new actress being announced."

'She didn't ask any more. She only went to a theatre to show her diamonds, and have a pleasant supper some where, with lots of champagne-cup. They neither of them knew Beltran personally, and had heard nothing.

'At the entrance we met Guilliadene, who was intimate with them.

'"What's up, Ned?" Wressyl asked him.

'"*Much Ado about Nothing*," said the Earl. "And a new actress as Beatrice. Never played publicly in her life they say. What a part to start with!"

'"Awfully plucky," said my Lancer. "Safe to make a mull of it, I suppose? Who is she?"

'"I don't know much about her," replied Guilliadene. "Merest novice, I think. Beltran's always picking up

stars that turn out to be sticks, like the rockets at Cremorne."

'And he went to his stall, and we to our box.

'The play had begun. This woman was on; you see what her beauty is, and she was costumed superbly; her hair was cut square on the forehead and waved loose behind, an anachronism, doubtless, but the very poetry of Coiffure. Her audience, which seemed an ordinary one, was apathetic and even hostile. It was the most piteous thing I ever saw. Her tones were almost inaudible; her colour kept coming and going; her agitation was very great; and she looked so young, such a child with it all, you would have thought that the public must have been touched. But it was not. It hissed a little; it yawned a great deal; and Mrs. Riversleigh and one or two women laughed loudly behind their fans. I think she heard the laughter, for I saw her shiver. Ah! it must be a terrible thing, that first sound of your own voice in the vastness and stillness; that first sight of the unknown crowd of satirical, indifferent, unpitying faces!

'The impersonation all through the first act was utterly tame and meaningless. If it had not been for her beauty, I think the house would have howled. As the curtain fell and Wressyl left the box for a moment, I managed to slip out and through the passages, till I got "behind," where there were only Beltran, Denzil, Dudley Moore, and Steinforth, the great author, you know. As the girl had come off the stage she had rushed away to her room before they could stay her. Beltran looked grave, and more anxious than I had seen him do one race-day when a beaten horse had cost him half an estate.

'"One can't say much for your new wonder!" they were muttering to him.

'"No," he answered, very quietly. "But I believe she will do well in time. You have not seen her act in private—I have."

'"I don't doubt her charms for any private performance," said Dudley Moore drily; "but we have really tried to float as great geniuses so many pretty women, with only their prettiness to recommend them that I am getting rather doubtful of the utility of the process—it can't claim novelty, and I fear it can't claim propriety."

'Beltran did not show either annoyance or impatience. "Don't judge her just yet," was all he said, very quietly still.

'When the actress was called again, and left her room, her face was quite white and her eyes all black and humid with a bewildered sort of terror.

'"I have acted so ill! I feel so frightened!" she murmured breathlessly to Beltran, not seeming to see that any others beside himself were present. He stooped to her very kindly and gently.

'"You have not done great things at present, certainly. But you can—and you will. Try and forget that any one is listening; and only remember how I want you to succeed."

'The last words were murmured so low that only she and I heard them. She drew a deep breath, the colour flushed her face, a sort of inspiration seemed to seize her, and she went. From that moment her acting was entirely changed. Her voice rang clear, and full of exquisite cadences; her beauty grew radiant with pride and strength. She seemed to feel her own force, and to be filled with the powers of art. All the beautiful insolences, all the changeful colours, all the splendid audacities, of genius shone out in her; and triumphed. Her audience, indifferent and even alienated before, were first startled and then captivated. They realised that this creature to whom they had been at best contemptuously indulgent, as to a lovely child whose failure they pitied, but whose weakness wearied them, was in truth their mistress, through the dominion of great gifts; and could force them to rejoice with her, to weep with her, to laugh, and to suffer, and to love with her, at her will and at her fancy. They woke from their apathy into a sort of fury of admiration; and the house rang with raptures of applause.

'"And there's not an ounce of that *bought*," murmured Beltran. "It's genuine, whatever it's worth."

'"We were right to suspend judgment," said Dudley Moore, taking snuff. I have never seen anything more poetic and more sincere, more delicate and more vivid"—and what he said the town was certain to say after him on the morrow.

'Her triumph was very great; only the greater it seemed

because heralded by failure. The house was convulsed with excitement; they called for her again and again; the women laughed no longer, and the roof rang with a tumult of applause.

'When she came off the stage for the last time after the recall, her face was deeply flushed; her eyes gleamed like two stars; her whole frame trembled; she had the look of a creature in delirium. She stretched out her hands to Beltran, with a little breathless hysterical sob, "Have I done well—at last?" He took them in his own and bent tenderly to her. "Better than the best: I cannot say how I thank you."

'At that moment one of the officials of the theatre, whom Wressyl had sent to seek me, bore me away, and back to Mrs. Riversleigh's box, where that lady was in wrath and dudgeon because the Lancer, in an excitement of admiration at the new Beatrice, had, unauthorised, flung her bouquet of red and white camellias upon the stage. We did not stay for the burlesque that evening, as the delicate little suppers at the Leviathan are too perfect to be kept waiting and I saw no more of the actress. But from that night her fame was made, and her name heard upon the lips of London.'

'And what is she to Beltran?" I asked, as she closed her narration.

Fanfreluche grinned: her worst grin.

'Ah, my dear! That's what the town's been asking ever since, and never has got an answer yet. But look they are going. Good-bye till to-morrow; I'm very glad to see you here again.'

When the little gathering broke up, the actress drew about her those black laces and sealskins lined with rose, which I had noticed on the couch, and stooping for me, raised me so that I could lie curled upon the soft sea-furs.

An elderly woman, who was in waiting in the ante-room, offered to take me, but she refused the offer, as she had declined those of the men about her, and carried me herself through the various passages to the entrance of the theatre, where a carriage stood. They accompanied her, talking the while with her, as men and women do who have the custom of daily association and familiar friendship; and bade her good-night at the door of her brougham, which

rolled rapidly away. She and her maid drove on in silence, whither, of course, I could not tell. When the carriage paused, we passed through a fragrant garden, whose leafless boughs were very dark and still in the dim moonlight, and thence through a very small square hall, and up a staircase in which the lights were burning low; it was too dark to see much, but all seemed pretty and luxurious about me; and as she carried me into a room on the right, I perceived that it was the chamber of one to whom both art and gold had ministered.

It was of small size, and of much simplicity; but it had an exceeding elegance and harmony in all its arrangements. She laid me down upon her sealskins, then sank into a chair before the hearth on which a fire was brightly burning. Her attendant asked her, with a solicitude that seemed quite genuine, if she were not very tired?

'I am often tired; that is no matter,' she answered with a smile, which though fatigued was very sweet and glad. 'Take these things off me, please, and bring me some tea.'

The maid obeyed, wrapping round her some cashmeres, and letting loose all the fair masses of her hair; then brought her the tea in a miniature old-fashioned service of egg-shell china, and left her alone by her desire. She called me from my resting-place and raised me on her lap; stroking me, and even laying her lips on my forehead.

'I shall love you for his sake. Had it not been for you I might never have known him,' she murmured. 'But still you can never be to me what my dear old friend was!'

And, looking at her thus, with the fire-glow upon her, I knew her, despite all the magic changes wrought by time, and gold, and fame. I knew her to be—Gladys Gerant.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STORY OF THE SEA.

I THINK Fanfreluche spoke with reason. Coincidence is a god that greatly influences mortal affairs. He is not a cross-tempered deity, either, always: and when you beat your poor fetish for what seems to you an untoward acci-

dent, you may do wrong; he may have benefited you far more than you wot.

Not very long ago, a man and a woman loving each other well, were parted by misunderstanding—one of those sad, dreary, proud fantasies, that so often arise between you human creatures and your happiness. Neither would stoop to explain, they were divided during two long years; for it is strange how people living in the same society may yet grow utter strangers to each other; how passing one another daily in the park, how brushing against one another in the opera corridors, how hearing one another's names uttered by many lips, how beholding one another's faces in the crowded rooms of great assemblies, or of private views, they may yet remain as utterly divided from one another, as though oceans rolled between them.

Well, the time came when the woman, haughty, lovely, and brilliant, was, through a series of family calamities, doomed to an exile that galled her bitterly, in a far-away lonely German forest-land.

Awhile later, the man, by what he deemed the bitterest injustice and injury to him in his service, which was diplomacy, was consigned as envoy to a miserable petty state, in which his talents rusted, and his name was unheard, and his weeks and months passed by in an unutterable weariness and inaction.

One summer day, in deep old Teutonic wood, where no footfall but a forester's or charcoal-burner's ever fell, and the millions of pines were wrapped in twilight even at noon, these two, each unwitting of the other's presence in the hated land of banishment, met face to face suddenly, in that stillness and that solitude. And in that moment their hearts went out to one another, and the veil fell from their eyes, and the old love reigned alone!

Pride had been strong in the press of the world; but here, chance touched and startled them, and surprise from both their secret; and thus from the thorns of harsh accident, there blossomed for them sweet flowers of passion and of peace.

('And, my dear, there was something beside chance, for there was ennui,' said that matter-of-fact iconoclast, Fanfreluche, when she heard of them. 'He must have been awfully bored, you know, and so was much readier to make

it up with her, than he had been when decently well amused in London. It's an immense pull for a woman, you know, to get at a man when he is thoroughly bored. He's so much more glad of her then.' But this was only the comment of a shallow cynic; and the story truly ran as I have told it.)

Coincidence now had tossed me back amongst life, and luxury, and friends; and I was glad and grateful: not querulous as you too often are when what you have long coveted comes to you.

When the morning broke I found myself in a small elegant house, as warm as an eider-bird's nest, and as pretty as an enamelled snuff-box; such a house as may be seen by the score along the Thames or the Seine; shut in amidst miniature gardens, that doubtless were one mass of foliage and flowers in summer, to judge by the maze of greenery that was now snow-powdered and silver-frosted.

It was so small and so pretty that it was like a toy; but in common with those little jewelled teapots, and stags, and other trifles that hang to your watch-chain, it was only such a toy as gold could purchase.

Once more there were the softness, and the smoothness, and all the nameless pleasantnesses of life when money rounds its angels about me. Once more I slumbered on silken cushions; and was fed on dainty forms of nourishment; and was prankt up* with bright ribbons upon my throat. And it was sweet to me to be thus soothed, and fed, and caressed, and decked, and dighted, as in my early days of fashion and of favouritism, for such outward symbols show that the world goes well with us, and that we are of value and of ornament in it. For it is all very well to call these things fribbles and frivolities, they may be so; but they are a great portion of the pleasure and the ease of existence at any rate. I know a man who was always inveighing against them (he was rich and possessed them, mind you), he was deeply bitten with many stern philoso-

* Puck seems fond now and then of retaining some of the archaisms of the language which he learned no doubt in the north country, where many of the strong picturesque words of Shakespeare and Piers Plowman are still in daily use. Why should such words be lost? Talkers may perhaps shrink from the charge of eccentricity incurred by using them; but writers surely need not care for it.—Ed.

phies of equality, and was wont to sigh for a time when bread and broth in even portions to all should vouch for the perfect isonomy of the State.

But whilst he thus theorised, I never knew any one more particular than he as to the age and delicacy of his wines; and in the autumn when he was belated, and perforce detained by a broken ankle, in a rough and remote Highland inn, his rage at the peat, and the fleas, and the oaten cake, and the rusty bacon, and the wretched rooms, was so dire that none durst scarce approach him.

'Equality would be very charming, dear—but still—I don't think you'd *do* for it,' said his pretty provoking wife, as he swore right and left at the Gaels.

This house in which I found myself was, as I say, exquisite; on that first morning breakfast was served in the daintiest fashion, in a bewitching little warm, violet-hued room, in which you caught here and there the glint of dead gold; and the mistress of it all (in whom beyond a question I saw the child whom I had once seen so sad and desolate in the streets striving to sell her dying harebells) was fully in keeping with such a chamber, as she sat in a low chair, beside the fire, reading her letters and papers of the early day, whilst her maid served her with chocolate and delicate bread, and purple hothouse grapes.

It was all perfectly charming: the fire, the chamber, the colour everywhere, the silence only broken by the singing of a bullfinch in the window; this beautiful woman, the very cream and biscuits that they brought me for my food, all were charming beyond measure on that winter morning, so cold without, so bright within, so vivid in contrast with those cheerless dawns which had broken so gray and biting in the attic of the house in Paris. And yet—my blood for a moment ran as cold as though I were hungry and homeless in the falling snow.

How could a friendless, penniless, helpless young creature, such as had been Gladys Gerant, have come to attain such comfort and such elegance as were present here, except through the ways of evil! For I knew that such transmutations can only be wrought by casting into the crucible of fate the pearl of honour that, perishing, leaves in its stead the coveted philosopher's stone, which is gold.

And yet I felt ashamed of my own thought, as I looked

at her delicate proud face, that from its innocence childish and sadness had changed into this exceeding beauty: altering so greatly, and yet retaining the same grave lustrous meditation in the eyes, the same dreaming sweetness on the mouth.

Whatever her life might be now, it was certain that she was a creature of most unusual loveliness, and grace, and genius; and no less certain that she was happy—happy with more than the mere feverish joys of fame. And to me, remembering her in her great misery and her desolate youth, it seemed that she could not be so entirely content as this, unless she had in some way killed her conscience.

For in my brief life I had seen that all which was noble and loyal, and of purity and honour, was most usually doomed to a long and weary thole; capable indeed of joy in its highest, but seldom if ever knowing it.

She sat beside the hearth reading; her room seemed filled with papers and new books; and I sat gazing at her wondering, wondering where was Bronze, who had made the wandering child into this exquisite empress, was the poor dead poet forgotten—above all, what was she herself to Beltran?

I shuddered as I thought: that pure child whom I had seen kneeling in the moonlight, with the prayer for her lost brother on her lips, could never have learned the wicked ways, and taken the wicked wage, of Avice Dare?

And yet, otherwise, how came she hither in this affluence and ease?

The morning passed very quietly; I was tired and slept a good deal, overcome with fatigue and excitement. I was awakened by the striking of the clock, and the appearance of a light luncheon. She scarcely touched it, and went afterwards into her drawing-room, carrying me with her; the room was as perfect as all the rest of the house, and was quite full of the bloom and odour of flowers, although the time of year was still winter.

She moved about a little, touching her flowers, pausing beside a picture, rearranging some china in the pretty way women have, then seated herself once more amidst the books.

Between two and three o'clock there was the grating of wheels in the carriage drive without, the sound of a man's

step, the tinkle of little bells, and there entered Beltran, followed whether he would or no by Fanfreluche.

He cast down a loose coat of sables, came to the hearth, and seated himself in a low lounging chair with the manner of one accustomed to frequent the place daily.

By the quick turn of her head, by the brilliance in her eyes, by her smile as she saw him, it was easy to tell how welcome his advent was. No formal greeting passed between them; they began to converse as though they had been together the last hour: people only do this betwixt whom there is an entire accord.

'Well, my dear, how do you find yourself?' asked Fanfreluche with a grin.

I said that I found myself very well.

'I dare say you do: it's a pretty place,' she said drily. 'On the whole Platonics don't seem such economical things as one thought they were—'

'What do you mean?'

'Never ask a person that. If his epigram or his argument be pointless or involved, you shouldn't show him that you think so, by asking him what he means. I told you I'd see you to-day: we come here most days when we're not hunting or shooting.'

'You don't hunt?'

'No. A terrier isn't such a fool. *We* nip our prey in the necks in a second: we don't run it across half a county, and lose it in a drain after all. And to see what the hunting is now too! Knocking the horses all to pieces over cramped ground for sake of a fast twenty minutes! This is a pretty little house, isn't it? The rent's three hundred a year, furnished just as it stands; only the china, and pictures, and bronzes, and things are all hers,—or his.'

'But how rich—'

'Well, he pays her at the rate of fifty guineas a week, or rather has it paid to her, for she don't know exactly that it's his. O, she's worth it, no doubt. She'd get it at any theatre, now. Gladys Gerant? O yes, she is Gladys Gerant; acts in the name to. People think it a fancy name because it's pretty. You see we have so many Polly Smiths and Betty Browns who are Amandevilles and Fitzosbornes upon the stage, that we think no woman can have a good graceful name really hers, unless she be in the

Libro d'Oro, and has 5000*l.* a year of her own. I told you he'd keep his promise, didn't I, when we were at Ascot?'

'But how has he kept it?' I murmured; 'it was well indeed with her, so far as success, affluence, ease, beauty talent went, but otherwise?—'

'I don't think that's any business of yours, my dear,' snapped Fanfreluche. 'I can't tell you anything. I knew nothing about her till that night she came out as Beatrice, and then, of course, I recognised the name, and remembered the story you'd told me.'

'But Bronze?'

'I know nothing about Bronze either. I was abroad, in different places, almost all last year, with my ambassadress, and my *prima donna*, and my truffle-maker. But there's a little low beast here, who can tell you, I daresay. He's called Patch, and lives in the kitchen by choice.'

'A cur?'

'Well—yes. A cur. Not that I like that word. They have snobs and cads, but we have no curs,—not in the sense of disparagement that they use the word to imply. Even the Lurcher, the lowest type amongst us, is immeasurably superior to their Rough. With a poached hare in his mouth, he has a brisk, innocent, pleased air, and a conscience well at ease. He has no idea of dishonesty, and has only done his duty as his master taught it him. He is loyal, as far as his light goes; he has served the power he reveres; he has obeyed the law-giver of his humble life, in ignorance, indeed, but in fealty and faith. When can they say as much? No—we have no curs in the sense that they have cads; for we have none in our race who strain to seem what they are not; who are made hideous by vulgarity, made grotesque by assumption, or made infamous by lying. The lowest, ugliest, most hungry, most honest mongrel is always natural and always faithful. It is impossible, therefore, for a dog to be a snob.'

'Does she suffer still for her brother, or still remember him?' I asked, not attending to her didactic digression.

'I can't tell you, I am sure,' she said, with a sniff of scorn. 'I never think much of their feelings at any time. They are all words. Creatures that take out their grief in crape and mortuary tablets can't feel very much.'

'There are many lamentations, from Lycidas to Lesbia,

which prove that whether for a hero or a sparrow—' I began timidly to suggest.

'That's only a commonplace,' snapped my lady. 'They chatter and scribble; they don't feel. They write stanza of "gush" on Maternity; and tear the little bleating calf from its mother to bleed to death in a long slow agony. They maunder twaddle about Infancy over some ugly red lump of human flesh, in whose creation their vanity happens to be involved; and then go out and send the springtide lamb to the slaughter, and shoot the parent birds as they fly to the nest where their fledglings are screaming in hunger. Pooh! Did you never find out the value of their words? Some one of them has said that speech was given them to conceal their thoughts. It is true that they use it for that end; but it was given them for this reason. At the time of the creation, when all except man had been made, the Angel of Life, who had been bidden to summon the world out of chaos, moving over the fresh and yet innocent earth, thought to himself, "I have created so much that is doomed to suffer for ever, and for ever be mute; I will now create an animal that shall be compensated for all suffering by listening to the sound of its own voluble chatter." Whereon the Angel called Man into being, and cut the *frænum* of his tongue; which has clacked incessantly ever since, all through the silence of the centuries.

'Where is that legend?'

'In our traditions, which differ as much from the human ones as the human ones do from each other: *on ne pourrait plus!*'

'It is a great pity we were denied the power of the art of writing.'

'Do you think so? We should never have kept our honesty if we had learnt it. Don't you know what that poor ruined Sir Robert said when he was dying? "If I had never known how to write my name upon paper, I should have been a good man, and a rich one now." My dear, if we had known how to write, we should have taken to "bills at 60 days, etc.," and a hound's kennel would soon have been no better than a club-room, with a sweepstakes card up on the mantelpiece!'

I yawned irritably. I was impatient of her talk. Your *pique-assiette*, as Lever has aptly yclept the professional

dinner-table jester, is very agreeable over the turtle soup and the trout à la Chambord; but as a continual companion he may be almost as tiresome as the bore of whom he relieves your dinner.

I prayed her to be quiet a little, and turned my attention to Beltran.

He was reading through several letters that Gladys had given him.

He looked at home there, stretched on the low long chair beside the fire, with that exquisite woman's face opposite him. He was not in the least altered; only I thought that his mouth had not quite so sarcastic a curl as of yore, and that his eyes had a very gentle and almost sad look in them that was new to their languor and coldness.

'You need not answer those at all,' he said, laying three of the letters aside. 'To these two dinner invitations send a brief refusal. To this manager, answer him that you have no intention to enter into any other engagements. For these fellows who want to send you MS. plays, silence will show them that we don't want their wares.'

'I would rather let them send their plays, and look at them,' she said pleadingly, as though she were not much used to place her wish in opposition to his.

'Why? They are certain to be trash.'

'Most likely. Only—you know, some one among these authors may be a poor boy, breaking his heart over his writings as *he* did. They are all unknown names, and it will not be much trouble to look through them; and there may be some touch of talent, some glow of genius, in one or other of them, that will die out altogether if treated always with silence.'

He smiled.

'Well, let them come if you like, though I fear they will hardly be worth the paper they are written on; and their verse will be emphatically "blank" as regards wit, grammar, meaning, or measure. As for these other two letters—have you read them?'

'No. They seemed—flattery and folly. You told me once it was best not to read letters that commenced in that strain, and so I never go further than the beginning—now.'

He looked content, but not surprised.

'I think you are right,' he said simply. 'Just read the

signatures, however, and send them back whence they came —without any comment. They *will* write these things to you—there is no help for it.'

'I suppose they admire me?' said Gladys thoughtfully, 'or they think it is the fashion to say so.'

He laughed; his old, curt, contemptuous laugh.

'Of course they admire you. There is no doubt about that. What a child you are still! Is there anything else?'

'Only this note from Lord Dammerell. He sent it up quite early with a wonderful little coffer, that, you see, he says belonged to the great Catherine. It was a beautiful thing; malachite crusted with opals, and the lock and hinges of gold. I wrote him my thanks, and begged to return it. His messenger took it away.'

She spoke quite indifferently, as of an every-day unconsidered trifle; but his face darkened as he took the note.

'Cis Dammerell!' he muttered; 'I introduced him to you myself.'

He said no more; but he tore the note into many little pieces, very slowly, and as if the action expressed anger that he did not put into words.

'I remember that coffer—at Christie's,' he said, after a pause. 'Dammerell will be slow to forgive you; he never had a rebuff before.'

'You said last night you were quite happy?' he asked her a few moments later abruptly. 'Are you very sure that is true?'

She looked up with surprise; her wondering smiling eyes answering before her words.

'True! Indeed it is true! I am so happy that I feel sometimes that I must be dreaming of this marvellous life. You see, it is still wonderful to me. All my childhood was so uneventful; we had so much sorrow in our pleasantest days; we had always the woe and care of such anxious needs; it was always so still there, and so simple, and so plain, just like one of those peaceful households that we read of in the old Puritan days; that you, who have had the world with you always, cannot understand how the colour and movement and change and beauty of this existence you have given me, seem to me half miraculous still. In the old time, when Harold and I used to walk at evening under the orchard trees and talk to one another of

all our fancies and our dreams, we used to picture just such a future as you have made my present. I have only one sorrow, only one—that I should have it all, and he never have enjoyed one hour of it! It seems so like avarice, selfishness, sin! And to think he cannot even know—'

She paused, with a quiver in the rich eloquent sweetness of her voice, which told me that her brother was unforgotten.

'You ask me that question often now,' she said, after a little while. 'Why do you doubt, how can you doubt that I am happy? Think how much I have, how much I enjoy; and what a desolate, friendless, hopeless child I was when I knew you first.'

Beltran flung the torn fragments of the note into the fire.

'I hardly know why I asked you. Only—I cannot do exactly as I would for you. You should not have such letters as these if I could prevent it; but it is difficult without doing you more harm than good.'

'They do not hurt me; and they go—there,' she answered him with a pretty half-haughty gesture of her hand toward the flames. 'I remember you warning me before you let me come to the stage, that in an actress's career, annoyances, humiliations, even insults were inevitable; because, her art being a public one, the world always deemed her life a public plaything too; and I told you what I thought then; that though she might be annoyed, she need neither be humiliated nor insulted, unless she chose to merit such abasement. I am an actress now, and yet I think so still,'

'You are but a child now, and therefore you think so still.'

'But is it not so? Humiliation is a guest that only comes to those who have made ready his resting-place and will give him a fair welcome. My father used to say to me, "Child, when you grow to womanhood, whether you be rich or poor, gentle or simple, as the balance of your life may turn for or against you, remember always this one thing—that no one can disgrace you save yourself. Dishonour is like the Aaron's Beard in the hedge-rows, it can only poison if it be plucked." They call the belladonna Aaron's Beard in the country, you know; and it is true that the cattle, simple as they are, are never harmed by it; just because, though it is

always in their path, they never stop and taste it. I think it may just be so with us; with any sort of evil.'

She spoke with all the mingled poetry and simplicity, all the tender thoughtful seriousness that I had heard in her when she had told her story to the dancer Nellie. She was a lovely woman now; sitting there on her own hearth, clad in velvet and in lace, and conscious of celebrity and of victory in her career; but there was the same nature in her as in the days when she had gone, a famished, desolate, houseless child, to the little garret in Westminster; and the same accent was in her voice, the same accent of mingled pride and innocence, of strength and trustfulness.

Beltran listened, with a certain trouble in his grey, calm, weary eyes. Something in the words touched him, I think; for he got up and began to tease the bullfinch on its perch, and to criticise the hanging of some cabinet pictures.

'You have put the Frère and the Tadema together,' he said, going up to them. 'For heaven's sake don't do that! Can't you see how they harm one another? The stately elegance and ceremonial of the Roman patrician life beside the little Breton interior, with two cottage-children at play with some faggots of gorse! Look how they hurt each other, and make each other look, respectively, coldly artificial and insignificantly homely! Pictures, like beauties, kill each other; I am afraid no sort of skill in the hanging of galleries will alter the fact, that the exhibition of many paintings amounts virtually to their extinction. We are getting too many, even into this little room.'

And they altered the place of the Frère and the Tadema, and talked of art, to which I did not care to listen. The thoughts of art made my heart ache; it brought to my memory the low, sunny, wooden chamber at the Silver Stag, with the white fruit-blossoms swaying at the casements, and the long shadows asleep upon the floor, where the Faustine had taken her birth from that prophetic passion which is at once the inspiration and the destruction of human genius— a flame which consumes even while it illumines and conceives.

'Can you tell what she is to him, my dear?' grinned Fanfreluche.

I admitted that I could not.

'Well, ask Patch; see if he can tell,' she responded.

'One isn't fond of intercourse with common dogs; but still when one can get anything out of them— How civil my Lord A. and the Hon. B. and Sir C. C. can be to a low brute on the racecourse, when they want to get at any straight tip, or be on for dark thing! I don't see why we need be more particular; and we have no class so slow as their bookmakers, touters, and nobblers. A dog may be unpolished; he may gnaw a bone on the hearth-rug; he may go wild after a herring-trail; he may carry his flag badly; he may demean himself to eat tripe; he may whine instead of bite when he's hurt; he may do many things which show him an under-bred one; but he is never a Snob, or a Cad, or a Rough, as I said just now; and thank heavens he's never a Blackleg!'

'Is it under-bred to whine when one is hurt?' I asked, conscious that despite my aristocracy of descent, I sinned in this particular,

'Very, my dear,' averred Fanfreluche; 'when you are hit, *bite*—bite deep and bite often. All success lies in the teeth; I told you that long ago.'

'But if we bite we are chained. or, still worse, we are killed.'

Fanfreluche grinned.

'There was once a dog, my dear, that was hit by three men, one after another, as they went by him where he lay in the sun; and in return he bit them—deep—and they let him alone then, and ever after sought to propitiate him. Well, the first he bit in the arm, where there was a brand for deserting; and the second he bit in the throat, where there was a hideous mole; and the third he bit on the shoulder, where there was a mark of a secret camorra. Now, not one of these three durst speak of the wounds in places they all wished to hide; and whenever afterwards they passed the dog, they gave him fair words, and sweet bones, and a wide berth. It is the dogs, and the satirists, and the libellers, and the statesmen who know how to bite like that—in the weak part—that get let alone, and respected, and fed on the fat of the land.'

At that moment, there entered the drawing-room Derry Denzil and Florance Fane of the Guards; two or three other men followed in a little time—men of similar rank, who had come to town, I suppose, for the sake of their clubs,

in the frost which made the 'grass countries' untenable at that moment. By the way, the other day, this autumn, I heard a woman whose dinners enjoy an excellent reputation ask an ex-Coldstreamer, famous with Tailby and Pytchley, when he would come to dine with her in the winter, which she was about to pass at her town quarters. 'I'll come *the first frost*,' said he, and she felt no offence; she understood thoroughly that herself and her *menu* played second to the 'little red rover,' and would be relegated if no frost came till the April days of budding chestnuts, and spring chickens, and new operas.

These men were all pleasant companions, as your thorough-bred man of the world almost always is, with his lazy sarcasms and his good-natured ironies, and his acquaintance with all the fresh mischief afloat, and his facile touches of art-knowledge and political knowledge, and his racy history now and then of some field-sport which he loves; in the telling of which all his pococurantism fades away, and all his restless recklessness gleams for a moment on the surface of his half-amused, half-weary discontent.

Such were these now; the fire burned brightly behind the broad banner-screens; the light played prettily about the delicate colours of the room; the dainty five-o'clock tea came, with sodas and seltzers; there were pleasant talk, airy nonsense, good-humoured disputes, melodious laughter.

It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to believe that I was not in one of these regal country-houses where, in the frosty weather, the men had gathered at the tea-hour in library or morning-room round some fair titled châtelaine.

'She is very much in society, it would seem?' I murmured to Fanfreluche.

'She is not in society at all, my dear,' averred that dictatress. 'Ask the Countess of Ben Nevis, who has had *liaisons* with every handsome *lion* out; or Lady Charles Whyte, who has her cottage in the Forest, to carry on her intrigues with the Guards; or Mrs. Vereker, who goes to Paris with Hailes Haynes the tenor, and is none the worse for the escapade, because her own people never have dropped her; ask them if they'd know Gladys Gerant the actress—their outraged virtue would be aghast!'

'Does she know no women, then?'

'None my dear. He wouldn't let her know the bad

ones; and the good ones—or the pseudo-good—wouldn't know her.'

'How shameful! how sad!'

'Not a bit. As for the sadness, I don't think myself that the British matron, whether heavy or frisky, is any such very great loss; and the British maiden, in her day of slang and salmon-fishing, of "big coups" and "awful yawners," certainly isn't. As for the shamefulness, that's nonsense. Every pleasure has its penalty. If a woman be celebrated, the world always thinks she must be wicked. If she's wise, she laughs. It is the bitter that you must take with the sweet, as you get the sorrel flavour with the softness of the cream, in your soup à la Bonne Femme. But the cream would clog without it, and the combination is piquant.'

'Only to jaded palates,' I retorted, for I have often tasted the Bonne Femme, and detest it.

By the way, what exquisite irony lies in some of your kitchen nomenclature!

'Perhaps not,' assented Fanfreluche, forgetting for once to disagree. 'But in this case a very choice hand prepares her portion, and the cream of it is made so sweet, that I don't think she's even found out yet that the sorrel-leaves lie at the bottom.'

And she left me to digest this dark saying as best I might, while she followed her master and the other men out of the drawing-room, and out of the house, as the little timepiece chimed the sixth hour.

At eight the young actress went to her art and her public. I strove to accompany her, but was not permitted.

Left to myself, I wandered through the various rooms to dissipate my ennui, and also to search for Patch.

There was a little chamber, down a few steps, into which I peeped; it was cosy and warm, but simply furnished; there on the hearth I saw a small, broken-haired, mongrel dog, with a white spot over one eye, which had doubtless gained him his name.

He was a little, shabby, wiry, good-natured-looking creature, and I made acquaintance with him—a little arrogantly, I fear; for, with the first glimpse of the blue-ribbon of revived aristocracy round my neck, I had consigned to oblivion the remembrance that I had ever danced for gain in the streets, and walked on my hind legs to beg for a copper coin.

'Yes, I am Patch,' he said. A little, straightforward, simple dog, evidently in nowise ashamed of his humble aspect and station.

Indeed, you never see any kind of base or petty pride amongst us; we will guard a knife-grinder's barrow, or sit beside a tinker's wayside work, with perfect loyalty and content, if grinder or tinker be our friend. Not so you. I have noticed in the best of you a certain failure in these respects.

In the old Oxford days, Bertram Byng, your young rough north-country comrade at Balliol, ground fine, with the wheel of his high intellect, the somewhat blunt edge of your own intelligence, in many an hour by Isis. And in that sad dreary winter at Nice, when you had just lost the woman you loved, and could not find in écarté the whole end and aim of existence, as the apostles thereof said you should, that poor, witty, dubious, dark-historied Ina Raby amused you immeasurably, and bore with you patiently, and served you in many ways, and gave you many wrinkles for the *quatre à* and *la belle*.

But when Bertram comes up now, rough and shabby, from his Devonian curacy, poor exceedingly, and with those old tendencies to roll Greek out so fearfully loud, and to heed not how many days' dust lie on his boots and his coat, only more intensely developed, you don't take him to the Athenæum or the Guards' Club for dinner; you dine him alone in your rooms, and tell your man 'Not at home.' So, too, when Ina Raby comes to you, and men drop their eyes and say 'What, *that* fellow! thought he was dead years ago, you know, &c.'—you make excuses for not riding at noon, and back out of taking him to Hurlingham, though you offer warmly to take him to Sydenham; and you continue to pass most of your time with your schooner where she lies in the Thames, and where Demi-monde and Bohemia can cruise with you—a hint which poor Ina, having been a gentleman in his day, quickly takes, and so pleads business in Paris, and goes back to the old weary life of whist and winter cities, of écarté and exile, of piquet and poverty, with a pang the more, maybe, in his heart.

It is thus with you. Whereas we—well, I will tell you a story.

Once at a great house in the west I saw a gathering on

the young lord's coming of age. There were half the highest people in England there; and a little while before the tenantry went to their banquet in the marquees, the boy-peer and his guests were all out on the terraces and the lawns. With him was a very noble deer-hound, whom he had owned for four years.

Suddenly the hound, Red Comyn, left his titled master, and plunged head-foremost through the patrician crowd, and threw himself in wild raptures on to a poor, miserable, tattered, travelling cobbler, who had dared to creep in through the open gates and the happy crowds, hoping for a broken crust. Red Comyn pounced on him, and caressed him, and laid massive paws upon his shoulders, and gave him maddest welcome—this poor hungry man, in the midst of that aristocratic festival.

The cobbler could scarcely speak awhile; but when he got his breath, his arms were round the hound, and his eyes were wet with tears.

'Please pardon him, my lord,' he said, all in a quiver and a tremble. 'He was mine once, from the time he was pupped for a whole two year; and he loved me, poor soul, and he ha'n't forgot. He don't know no better, my lord—he's only a dog.'

No; he didn't know any better than to remember, and be faithful, and to recognise a friend, no matter in what woe or want. Ah, indeed, we are far behind you!

For the credit of 'the order,' it may be added, that Red Comyn and the cobbler have parted no more, but dwell together still upon that young lord's lands.

'I am Patch,' said this little cross-bred fellow, 'and I belong to Margett Llansaint?'

'And who is Margett Llansaint.'

Patch with a glance showed me an old woman asleep by the fire.

'She is my mistress. She is Welsh.'

'And what does she do here?'

'She is here by Lord Beltran's wish. She was housekeeper to two generations of his family. They gave her an annuity and a little cottage on the Island.'

'It was where he took Gladys?'

'I don't know exactly what you mean. One summer Gladys Gerant came to us with a blue-eyed girl called

Nellie, who did not remain very long. It was by Lord Beltran's desire; and he visited her twice or thrice himself, not often. She was in infinite woe because of the death of her brother. She did not gain health or strength at all till the spring came round.'

'And he kept her there at his cost?'

'I cannot say. Margett was well paid for her; but I think it came from some moneys that some book of her brother's had brought. So, at least, I knew that our lord told her. She was with us all the summer. Our cottage is so quiet and so fragrant, with the sea just seen through the great sweetbriar hedges, and the trees of dog-roses and myrtles. She used to dream all her days away by the sea. It seemed to bewitch her; she would gaze at it for hours.'

'Did he come often?'

'No, very seldom. But I think she measured time by his coming only. With the winter we moved near London, to a little quiet place in Esher. I believe still by his direction. Here she had teachers and masters of divers kinds. And she studied hard, and long into the night. Her eyes grew brilliant; her loveliness increased; her whole soul seemed filled with some great ambition. Then Lord Beltran came oftener, and at the close of the time brought two or three others with him, and I heard them talk of some eminence to which she would rise. One night in the late autumn she went away for several hours, and I suppose it was to this theatre, for ever since I have heard that she had become a great actress; I am not sure what that is, I do not understand much that they say. With the turn of the year we came to this pretty house; we have been here twelve months. I believe Lord Beltran desires Margett to be with her; but for me—I shall be very glad to go back to the Cottage.'

'And what is he to Gladys?'

Patch looked at me in honest surprise.

'What do you mean? I don't know indeed. Her friend of course, for he is very good to her.'

I felt abashed at my own thoughts. But this is th worst of seeing the world, that you see so much evil thae you suspect it everywhere.

'You cannot tell me any more, then?' I asked.

'Anything more? I don't know what you mean. I do

not like exactly what I do see. This Gladys was a woe-begone, white-faced child when she came down to the Island; and she used to sit staring at the sea, as I say, with her great melancholy eyes; and she was only a poor yeoman's daughter; I have heard her tell Margett so, again and again; and now she is made a great lady of, though she is no one's wife; and she has all this grandeur about her, and she is caressed, and flattered, and decked with velvet and silks and laces. I do not like it—though I grant, when she was in the Island, she was always prettily willing to serve Margett with tending the garden, or the fowls, or anything that chanced; and now, though she is cockered up like this, she is always gentle-spoken and kindly of thought—'

'But why do you not like it?' I urged.

'It seems so absurd, and—I am not quite sure what an actress is, but I think it is something wicked—'

'O no—not always; and she is a genius, they say.'

'A genius? You must mistake. I have always heard that a genius is something that they beat to death first with sticks and stones, and set up on a great rock to worship afterwards. Now they make her very happy whilst she is alive. She cannot possibly be a genius.'

'You are sure she is happy?'

'She would be crazed indeed if she were not,' said Patch with a little indignation. 'A girl like that, who came starved and half-dying, to be set up here like a queen, with lords and gentlemen around her—of course she is happy, though I know she grieves at times still for her lost people and Bronze.'

'Ah, Bronze, dear Bronze!' I cried. 'Where is he?'

'Bronze is dead.'

Although I had felt so certain of the answer I should receive, that, coward-like, I had shrunk from asking it, the certainty struck me with a sharp and sudden pang.

'Dead!' I echoed stupidly. 'Dead! of old age?—of illness?'

'Of neither. The sea killed him.'

I begged him to tell me all; and he told it, in a quaint poetic, simple fashion which had a sound in it that brought to me the memory of old Trust.

'The girl Gladys came to us in Midsummer, and Bronze

came with her, and the dancer too,' commenced the little seabred dog. 'The dancer did not tarry long; she was a saucy feckless creature it was easy to see, with ribbons and roses and all manner of follies about her; but she was soft of voice and of foot, and she seemed quite shy, as one might say, with Gladys, and to have taken quite a strange sort of love for her. I call it strange, because I was told that they had never met until a day or so before they were thus sent to us. The little dancer was loth to leave Gladys, and she was bidden to stay whilst she pleased; But the silence about and the sight of the sea seemed to daunt her and fright her;—I cannot tell how. "If I stayed long enow here," I heard her mutter one day, "it would kill me for the business. I should think, and think, and think till every bit of heart for my work would go out of me like; all the jigging, and the singing, and the punning, and the—rest of it, would seem such pitiful stuff, and so foolish and vile; and where, I wonder, should me and granny be then?" I remember her words, though I only half-guessed what she meant. They let her do as she would, and she went away after a week. It was sorrowful to see how she clung to Gladys and sobbed—and Gladys so still and hopeless and silent, like a frozen creature, as she had been, they said, since the news of the death of her brother. "I hope and pray you'll never reproach me, dear?" Nellie cried over and over again. "I hope and pray you'll never reproach me!" I do not think Gladys knew what she said: she seemed to hear and notice nothing in those days. As for me, I could not tell the meaning of the words. I suppose the dancing-girl must have done her some wrong?'

I said nothing: to me such fear, such misgiving, seemed intelligible enough. I knew that Nellie had sought for her a succour that the world would have said was certain to be such succour alone as the kite gives the wood-dove with talon and beak. I doubted not that her mind had misgiven her for the issue of her work many and many a time since the day that she had rejected the old Roman scarabæi.

'Well, she went from us,' resumed the little quaint, bigoted narrator, 'and Margett Llansaint was glad when she was gone. All Margett's reverence for her master could not make her see that it was fitting to have under her roof a girl that wore mock roses in her hat, and mock laces on her

bodice, and mock gems on her fingers, and who showed herself in a boy's dress nightly to the public, by her own confession.

'Gladys was different, you know, with that noble old-world look about her; and that great grief that made her so still and lifeless; and that grave simple fashion of her speech which had a dignity in it too. And, besides, she was an innocent child, and had scarce been off the borders of her father's farm-lands. So the dancer went her ways, but Gladys and Bronze abided with us. It was Margett's lord's will, as I say; and she strove her best to make them happy. And despair is not natural to youth, you know: through the long autumn and winter Gladys was ill, and very restless and very sad, and seemed to know no pleasure save in watching the sea in its wrath; but when the spring came, and the white sails gleamed in the distance, and the almond-trees put forth their bloom, and the little blue gentian blossomed in the clefts of the rocks, and the fisher-children came out to play on the sands, the young life in her seemed to wake, and to take interest in the life around her. She was always beside the sea—morn, noon, and eve, and Bronze never left her side. The fisher-people all came to know her, and to care for her very much. The rudest amongst them grew to think it honour to take her out upon the waters, and would hang an old sail upon a spar to shield her from the sun, and deck their boat as gaily as they could with seaweeds and with speargrass. Margett used to murmur to herself that it was a purposeless life for one who would have to find her own support in time to come; and once she plucked up heart of grace and dared to write so much—humbly—to Lord Beltran. And he wrote back only one line—"Let her please herself; and don't trouble me." Was it not a heartless answer? I do not think he cared anything for her—in those days. He had placed her with us, and thought of her no more; as he would have thought no more of a spaniel placed with a keeper.

'Well, through all the summer it was the same. She spent well-nigh all her time drifting on the waters, or reading and thinking beside the sea. Our home was a little quiet chine, with no harbour or landing-place of any kind; where there was only a cluster of fishermen's cottages; and

where no strange ships or strange people ever came. A yacht, indeed, would scud past now and then, but very seldom; for you know they go but little on the southern side. She was never disturbed or molested: and in the sea-air, and the southerly sun, and the salt-bitten winds she seemed to get beauty so suddenly; such a new vivid sea-born beauty, that gave such a glow to her hair, such depth to her eyes, such warmth to her lips; and I think she was happy—despite her sorrow and her loneliness—happy in her freedom, and in her youth, and in her dreams.

'And she did dream: I used to see that in her eyes when she would sit at night by the lattice of her little room where the moonlight would stream, bright as any lamp, upon the pages of her book; and through the open casement, across the brier-rose hedge, and through the boughs of the almonds, she would see the great silvered width of the sea, the sea that her brother had longed for in thirst and weariness, and had never in life beheld, they say.

'Well, all this time Bronze would never leave her. He was at her feet in the boats, at her side in the woods and on the shore, against her door by night, and continually within her shadow in the day.

'And Gladys clung to him beyond everything. "You see he is all I have left, and he, too, knew *them*," she would say to Margett. I suppose she meant her dead people. Bronze had never left her,—not an hour, I think, save twice in the rough weather time: once when he went to seek for some men lost on the downs above in a snow-drift; and once, on a wild night, when a cobble (smuggling a brandy keg or two, in truth) was wrecked on a rock hard by, and he swam to it and brought safe to land the fisherman's two-year-old child, who had been asleep in its cot when father, and mother, and child, and nets and tackle, and kegs and all, had been tumbled out into the sea. For these two deeds the people about, of course, thought great things of Bronze, and always brought him pieces of their freshest fish and fattest bacon; and he generally gave it almost all away, letting all the small, famished, quarrelsome, unhappy dogs of the village come about him, and share it at pleasure.*

* I have also seen a dog do this—sitting by in generous content whilst his lean brethren made feast on his goods.—Ed.

'Well, one summer day, in the forenoon, Gladys and Bronze were out on the shore, and I was with them. It was far in the afternoon, a splendid day, with a blue sea running calm yet high. The wind was fresh and the tide was down. We wandered somewhat far out upon the beach. The great rocks, that the water always hid when it was high, were so cool and smooth and brown; and the grey sand between them had been all waved and marked in such pretty fashion by the waves; and all about there were such clear, bright, shallow pools, filled with the curling, sweet-smelling seaweeds, and the many-coloured stars of the sea-anemones: and then beyond, on what was always the land, the great wall of cliff, streaked with many hues, and the woods above, and the little cottages underneath, covered with fuchsia and honeysuckle.

'We wandered far over the beach, so far that we almost reached the lip of the last lazy wave as the sea went out on its southward way; and we spent some time down there on the low sands. Gladys had with her some books and a great osier kreel that she used sometimes to cast over her shoulder as the fisherwomen cast theirs, and which she in her ramble nearly filled with all kinds of sea-ribbons, and grasses, and shells, and pebbles, and of the moist brown sea-weed, for which Margett had some household use. She used to look very pretty there, with her garments tucked away to leave her delicate limbs free for motion; and her head bare to the sun; and the basket slung upon her back, filled with the trailing algæ; and her cheeks warm and her hands wet with the breath and the touch of the sea. She is a great lady now, of course, in her velvets and lace; but, to my taste, she was lovelier then. I do not know if Lord Beltran ever thinks so. I should suppose he would; he is a man of taste, they say. He saw her so? Yes, once or twice, when he came round to that part of the coast in a schooner he has for his use. And, if I remember, he sketched her so—once.

'Well, this noontide was very warm, and when she had filled the kreel she sat upon a rock to read. As she did so a tiny skiff, with one tiny white sail, was putting off from land, or at least from as near land as the shallow water would let it approach. Catching sight of her, the sailor with it waded back and came to her. He was a good simple fellow who

lived in one of the huts of the beach, and worked sometimes with colliers, sometimes with fishing-smacks. He was full of trouble now, and poured his sorrow out to her. It seemed that he had been on shore seeking her. His wife, who was on board a fishing-smack that lay off the land, some mile or so westward, down the coast, was very ill—dying, he feared—and had begged of him, if he could find Gladys, to entreat her to go and speak to her. He had been compelled to come to the village for bread, and tackle, and other things he needed; and the doctor he could nowhere find. This woman was a delicate, pretty, good-living creature, and Gladys had won her heart with many little tender services in the drear winter time gone by. It was a common thing with her to visit the people on board their vessels, for she loved nothing so well as to sail to and fro on the sea; and they had a superstitious belief in her because she was so different to themselves.

'She told him she would come at once, and laid the wicker kreel, and the books, and a little rough waterproof cloak, upon the brown boulder on which she had been just about to make her seat, and on which Bronze and I were lying. "Come!" she called to Bronze; but the sailor stopped her. "I dursn't take him, miss, not for our lives!" he said earnestly. "He's the weight of a man; and the boat's so over-crowded now with things as I've had to get in the Chine, that you're to the full as much as ever I dare carry."

'"I cannot leave him!" she answered, shrinking back; indeed she never had left him. He was always with her, whether on sea or land, and they clung passionately to one another.

'"I can go and come for you again, miss," said the fisherman ruefully; "but it will take a goodish bit of time—and Jenny so bad, and nobody but the boy with her, and the doctor not to the fore neither. Sure the dog 'll wait for you here, miss, safe enow. Not as I'd be pressing you."

'But he did press her,—pressed her sorely.

'It was very reluctantly that she was induced to leave Bronze there. Nothing save the knowledge of the value and the misery of each fleeting minute to the sick woman would ever have persuaded her. As it was, she threw her arms about him and kissed him on the forehead; then

pointed to the kreel of shells and seaweed on the red smooth piece of rock.

'"Take care of them, dear Bronze," she murmured; "and wait till I come back. Wait here."

'She did not mean to command; she only meant to console him by the appointment of some service.

'Bronze looked in her face with eyes of woe and longing; but he made no moan nor sound, but only stretched himself beside the kreel on guard. I am always glad to think that as she went she turned, and kissed him once again.

'The boat flew fast over the water. When boats leave you, and drag your heart with them, they always go like that; and when they come, and your heart darts out to meet them, then they are so slow!

'The boat flew like a seagull, the sun bright upon her sail. Bronze, left upon the rock, lifted his head and gave one long low wail. It echoed woefully and terribly over the wide quiet waters. They gave back no answer,—not even the poor answer that lies in echo.

'It was very still there. Nothing was in sight except that single little sail shining against the light, and flying—flying—flying.

'Now and then you could hear a clock striking in the distant village, the faint crow of a cock, the far-off voices of children calling to one another.

'But where we were, there was quite silence, for the things of the sea are so noiseless. The little sea-mouse stole athwart a pool; the grey sea-crabs passed like a little army; the tiny sea creatures that dwelt in rosy shells thrust their delicate heads from their houses, to peep and wonder at the sun. But all was noiseless. How dared they make a sound, when that great sea, that was at once their life and death, was present with its never-ceasing "Hush!"

'Bronze never moved, and his eyes never turned from the little boat that went and left him there—the little boat that fast became merely a flash and speck of white against the azure air, no bigger than the breadth of a sea-gull's wings.

'An hour drifted by. The church clock on the cliffs had struck four times; a deep-toned, weary bell, that tolled for every quarter, and must often have been heard, at dead of night, by dying men, drowning unshriven and unhouselled,

'Suddenly the sand about us, so fawn-hued, smooth, and beautifully ribbed, grew moist, and glistened with a gleam of water, like eyes that fill with tears.

'Bronze never saw: he only watched the boat. A little later the water gushed above the sand, and gathering in a frail rippling edge of foam, rolled up and broke upon the rock.

'And still he never saw; for still he watched the boat.

'Awhile, and the water grew in volume, and filled the mouse's pool till it brimmed over, and bathed the dull grasses till they glowed like flowers; and drew the sea-crabs and the tiny dwellers of the shells back once more into its wondrous living light.

'And all around the fresh tide rose, silently thus about the rocks and stones; gliding and glancing in all the channels of the shore, until the sands were covered, and the grasses gathered in, and all the creeping, hueless things were lost within its space; and in the stead of them, and of the bronze palm-leaves of weed, and of the great brown boulders gleaming in the sun, there was but one vast lagoon of shadowless bright water everywhere.

'And still he never saw; for still he watched the boat.

'I roused him, and he looked; only one fleeting look. His eyes went back to the gleam of the distant sail.

'By this time the tide, rolling swiftly in before a strong sou'-wester, had risen midway against the rock on which we had been left, and was breaking froth and foam upon the rock's worn side. For this rock alone withstood the passage of the sea; there was nought else but this to break the even width of water. All other things save this had been subdued and reapen.

'And the sea so long has reaped side by side with the reaper Death, that it reaps full sure and true, and will leave nothing ungarnered.

'"Will you die there?" I cried to him.

'"If so it be willed," he made answer.

'"Are you mad? See the waters!"

'"I see them."

'"See them! and know they are death?"

'"I know they are death."

'"But you could swim to the shore?"

'"Yes."

'"Then why do you tarry here?"

'"I must tarry till she comes."

'"Though it is death?"
"Though it is death!"
"But that is madness!"
'"It is duty."
'"To die, choked by the sea, is duty?"
'"To die, anyhow, at one's post."
'"But she had forgotten."
'"That may be. But she bade me wait."
'"Then you will wait for your death!"
'"I must wait for whatever chances."

'By this time the sea had risen within the height of the rock by the breadth of a man's two fingers. It was all deep water around; and the water glowed a strange emerald green, like the green in a lizard or snake. The shore, that had looked so near, now seemed so far, far off; and the woods were hidden in mist, and the cottages were all blurred with the brown of the cliff, and there came no sound of any sort from the land—no distant bell, no farm-bird's call, no echo of children's voices. There was only one sound at all; and that was the low, soft, ceaseless murmuring of the tide as it glided inward.

'I entreated him again.

'Again the same answer returned.

'The waters rose till they touched the crest of the rock; but still he never moved. Stretched out upon the stone, guarding the things of her trust, and with his eyes fastened on the sail which rose against the light, he waited thus—for death.

'I urged no more, but struck off towards land. I was light, and a strong swimmer. I had been tossed on those waves from my birth. Buffeted, fatigued, blind with the salt sea spray, drenched with the weight of the water, I struggled across that calm dread width of glassy coldness, and breathless reached the land.

'By signs and cries I made them wot that something needed them at sea. They began to get ready a little boat, bringing it down from its wooden rest on high dry ground beneath the cliff. Whilst they pushed and dragged through the deep-furrowed sand I gazed seaward. The shore was raised; I could see straight athwart the waters. They now were level with the rock; and yet he had never moved.

'The little skiff had passed round the bend of a bluff; and was out of his sight and ours.

'The boat was pushed into the surf; they threw me in. They could see nothing, and trusted to my guidance.

'I had skill enough to make them discover whither it was I wanted them to go. Then, looking in their eagerness whither my eyes went, they saw him on the rock, and with a sudden exercise of passionate vigour, bent to their oars and sent the boat against the hard opposing force of the resisting tide. For they perceived that, from some cause, he was motionless there, and could not use his strength; and they knew that it would be shame to their manhood if, within sight of their land, the creature who had succoured their brethren in the snow, and saved the two-year child from the storm, should perish before their sight on a calm and unfretted sea and in a full noon sun.

'It was but a furlong to that rock; it was but the breadth of the beach, that at low water stretched uncovered; and yet how slowly the boat sped, with the ruthless tide sweeping it back as fast as the oars bore it foreward!

'So near we seemed to him that one would have thought a stone flung from us through the air would have lit far beyond him; and yet the space was enough, more than enough, to bar us from him, filled as it was with the strong adverse pressure of those low, swift, in-rushing waves.

'The waters leaped above the summit of the rock, and for a moment covered him. A great shout went up from the rowers beside me. They strained in every nerve to reach him; and the roll of a fresh swell of water lifted the boat farther than their utmost effort could achieve, but lifted her backward, backward to the land.

'When the waters touched him he arose slowly, and stood at bay like a stag upon a headland, when the hounds rage behind, and in front yawns the fathomless lake.

'He stood so that he still guarded the things of his trust; and his eyes were still turned seaward, watching for the vanished sail.

'Once again the men, with a loud cry to him of courage and help, strained at their oars, and drove themselves a yard's breadth farther out. And once again the tide, with a rush of surf and shingle, swept the boat back, and seemed to bear her to the land as lightly as though she were a leaf with which a wind was playing.

'The waters covered the surface of the rock. It sank

from sight. The foam was white about his feet, and still he stood there—upon guard. Everywhere there was the brilliancy of noontide sun; everywhere there was the beaming calmness of the sea, that spread out, far and wide, in one vast sheet of light; from the wooded line of the shore there echoed the distant gaiety of a woman's laugh. A breeze, softly stirring through the warm air, brought with it from the land the scent of myrtle thickets and wild flowers. How horrible they were—the light, the calm, the mirth, the summer fragrance!

'For one moment he stood there erect; his dark form sculptured, lion-like, against the warm yellow light of noon; about his feet the foam.

'Then all noiselessly, a great, curled, compact wave surged over him, breaking upon him, sweeping him away. The water spread out quickly, smooth and gleaming like the rest. He rose, grasping in his teeth the kreel of weed and shells.

'He had waited until the last. Driven from the post he would not of himself forsake, the love of life awoke in him; he struggled against death.

'Three times he sank, three times he rose. The sea was now strong, and deep, and swift of pace, rushing madly in; and he was cumbered with that weight of osier and of weed, which yet he never yielded, because it had been her trust. With each yard that the tide bore him forward, by so much it bore us backward. There was but the length of a spar between us, and yet it was enough!

'He rose for the fourth time, his head above the surf, the kreel uplifted still, the sun-rays full upon his brown weary eyes, with all their silent agony and mute appeal. Then the tide, fuller, wilder, deeper with each wave that rolled, and washing as it went all things of the shore from their places, flung against him, as it swept on, a great rough limb of drift-wood. It struck him, as he rose; struck him across the brow. The wave rushed on; the tide came in; the black wood floated to the shore; he never rose again.

'And scarcely that span of the length of a spar had parted us from him when he sank!

'All the day through they searched, and searched with all the skill of men sea-born and sea-bred. The fisher, whose little child he had saved in the winter night, would not leave

him to the things of the deep. And at sunset they found him, floating westward, in the calm water where the rays of the sun made it golden and warm. He was quite dead; but in his teeth there still was clenched the ozier kreel, washed empty of its freight.

* * * * * * *

'She grieved for him?'

'Yes. She was as one mad with grief awhile; crying out that he was her only friend upon earth; and that it was through her that death had come to him.

'But human grief passes on swiftly; see—you have heard her laugh to-day! They buried him there; on the shore underneath the cliff, where a great wild knot of myrtle grows, and the honeysuckle blooms all over the sand. And when Lord Beltran in that autumn came, and heard how he had died in the fulfilling of a trust, he had a stone shapen and carved; and set it against the cliff, amongst the leafage and flowers, high up where the highest winter tide will not come. And by his will the name of Bronze was cut on it in deep letters that will not wear out, and on which the sun will strike with every evening that it shall pass westward above the sea; and beneath the name he bade three lines be chiselled likewise, and they are these:

"HE CHOSE DEATH RATHER THAN UNFAITHFULNESS.
HE KNEW NO BETTER.
HE WAS A DOG."'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'MILORD, THE HAWK.'

THREE or four days passed in like manner, and I grew attuned to the gracious harmonies of pleasure and of riches. I wore my blue rosette, without too bitterly remembering the coat of La Pipetta; and I basked in the fireside warmth, without too poignantly recalling the icy moonlit nights in the drear Parisian garret. I had the blood of aristocrats in me, though I had been reared in a rush basket in a cottage; and to my temper all ease and elegance seemed even as a second nature. You shall keep the plebeian in a palace a

score of years, and he shall ever wear his purple, and bear his orb, as though the one were a suit of rags and the other a ball of lead. But you shall keep the patrician in a hovel a score of years, and he shall ever wear his hempen shirt and bear his reaper's sickle, as though the one were a princely robe and the other a knightly sword. *Bon sang ne peut mentir;* and against a throne it will cry out, 'Ye who sit there are sots and fools!' and from a beggar's eyes it will say with a challenge, 'My fathers once ruled in the land!' It cannot lie; and perhaps it is for that reason that the old blood is now hated, in an age which has exalted lying to a science—the one supreme social science of Success.

I was soon perfectly at home in this pretty *maisonnette;* but I was no nearer to penetration of its mysteries—if mysteries indeed they were. Gladys read her days away; her men friends came and went; the atmosphere was always full of flowers and birds, songs and pleasant voices, all the colours of art, and all the movements of thought. She lived in utter solitude here; but the world came to her on the tongues of those who knew it best; and all that was new, or rare, or welcome, seemed to find its way to her; and, if at night she went to the physical and mental fatigues of the stage, she went also to the brilliancy of victory and to the sustenance of homage.

I could not marvel that she was happy; happy with the vague, untroubled, slumbrous happiness of a dream. Too happy, surely, I thought, for shame to rest with her. I was perplexed; I was troubled; I could scarcely doubt that some wrong there was of necessity somewhere: but yet—when she came to me, and lifted me against her sweet rich lips, and murmured gentle words to me of that night when we had been first in wretchedness and solitude together, I could not disbelieve her innocence. I could not credit that the fair lone child whom I had seen kneel down in prayer, had grown in this brief time callous and dishonoured.

Besides—the cream was so rich; the cushions were so soft; the cakes were so sweet; the hands that combed my curls were so gentle. I resigned myself to enjoy them, asking not if the source of my good fortune were tainted. It was wrong, I know; very wrong in the creeds of my race. I became almost as selfish as though I were human!

On the fifth night after my arrival I contrived to ensconce

myself under the sealskins, and to revisit the coronet unrepulsed.

I found it, as Fanfreluche had said, far more attractive than ere the rioters had wrought their wild work on it. Looking on the body of the house from the side I saw that in every detail, the artistic taste of its lordly lessee had prevailed over all considerations of economy. It was indeed a model theatre. The hangings were of amber satin; the panels of the boxes contained charming little landscapes; the private boxes, of which there were many, were like tiny boudoirs, with their mirrors, their lounging chairs and their lace curtains. The musicians played out of sight; the place of the former orchestra was filled by a moss-covered bank covered with evergreens and flowers. The officials were all good-looking girls, dressed in a pretty costume of blue slashed with silver. Out of the first corridor was a spacious smoking-room, with easy couches and a supply of the evening papers, where men could enjoy their cigars in the *entr'actes* without annoying any woman. All was light, bright, luxurious, fantastic, as befits a place that is the abode of amusement, and depends for success on the compensation which it offers to people for leaving their dinner-tables immediately after the ice.

It was as choice, as artistic, as seductive, as suggestive of every indolent enjoyment as a *bonbonnière* painted by Fragonard and fitted by Siraudin; and all that was fashionable and aristocratic in the town came to it. And yet I heard a man, whom I did not know, say on the staircase to another:

'Charming! perfectly charming! But it can't pay!'

And the other, in whom I recognised Dudley Moore, answered—

'It would pay if Beltran were Farquhar; if Gladys Gerant were Laura Pearl; if the music were from Canterbury Hall instead of the great composers; if the entertainment were witless buffoonery instead of delicate art; if everything were not what it is, in a word, which is the common recipe for the regeneration of all matters!'

'Why say that?' urged his companion. 'It was all you describe under the old *régime*, and it was a dead loss also then!'

Dudley Moore took snuff.

'Ah! Our clever lessee has a knack of always falling in

love with all his First Actresses. I don't know how any theatre *can* pay under those circumstances.'

I had no business on the grand stairs; and I scurried away and took shelter in the dressing-room of Gladys.

It was tiny, as all such rooms in a theatre are; but it was tastefully fitted up with white and rose. No one ever came there, save her maid. She was alone sitting still and thoughtful. She was dressed for Lady Teazle, and her face looked so youthful and so 'flower-like' in its contrast with the powdered coiffure and the magnificent costume of brocade and of satin, with its train of cloth of gold, and the great cross of diamonds which glittered on her throat.

It seemed a strange career for one so young; a strange fate for a child reared in the grave pastoral simplicity of what must have been an almost puritan household. Yet that she was happy in it there could be no doubt; and that it had in no way tainted the proud purity of her nature seemed almost as little to be questioned.

I gazed at her, marvelling greatly, reasoning, as society doubtless reasoned, that a creature of her years, of her utter desolateness, of her absolute pennilessness, could never have come to be seated there, with the homage of all fashionable London hers, with those diamonds on her breast, with those golden robes trailing behind her, with that theatre for her arena, and its owner for her only friend, unless with all these vanities and all these successes she had not also accepted the usual price paid for them—dishonour!

And yet I could not look thus at her without shame for this thought. Despite her beauty, despite her position, despite her luxurious little villa, despite even that matchless rose-diamond cross, gleaming above the beating of her heart, it seemed impious to doubt that the dead boy's sister was one whit less innocent than when she had knelt down in the moonlight to pray for Harold—one whit less nobly proud than when she had repulsed the offered charities of the little dancer. The eyes were dreaming, indeed, looking far away, with the imaginative, poetic gaze of 'one who beholds visions;' but there was not in them the look of one who gazes backward at a sin.

Though the diamonds seemed to me like the orbs of a snake—a snake that coils about a woman never to let her free again—yet I could not believe that she, though thus

transformed, could be less fit to meet her father's sight than when she had stood beside him to read the Scriptures aloud at evensong in the old homestead of her birth. Evil might be about her; but surely, I thought, evil had not as yet consumed her.

As she rose and opened her door there came in from the body of the theatre ringing music of the orchestra, the buzz of the talking audience, the sounds of a rapidly filling house; the scent of some costly hothouse bouquets that had been sent her, and which her maid was bringing in;—I shivered and sickened, In this world—the world of Laura Pearl—was it possible for any woman to hold her honour, to retain her dignity.

At that moment she was called, and passed on to the stage. The piece played that night was the perennial *School for Scandal.*

In such pure comedy and elegant art she was supreme, they said; though her still greater triumphs were in parts of pathos and of power.

Lady Teazle is a rôle which any actress who is graceful and a gentlewoman can play with ease. There are but little light and shade in it; and there is not any kind of passion. But even here there was so much grace in her; all conventional readings were so utterly discarded; there were such charming alternations of playful piquance and of scornful dignity; whilst over the whole was cast the ineffable charm of a youth so seductive, that I no longer wondered at the celebrity with which the town had crowned her.

She was so entirely self-unconscious, too; so utterly negligent of the public that hung on her words: she played as a lovely woman might play for her own pleasure before her mirror, with none standing by; given with all this her personal beauty and her grace of motion, it was no wonder that even Dudley Moore confessed himself for once 'satisfied.'

'You play that perfectly, my dear,' said the great critic, coming behind the scenes.

'Yet you say that they will never come to see anything that is even good,' said Gladys, with a smile and a movement of her head backward to the crowded house.

'They will always come to see a pretty woman,' returned the censor curtly. 'I know too much of human nature ever

to have denied *that*. What beautiful diamonds you have! They are new?'

'Lord Beltran lends them to me. They are his family jewels.'

'That has luckily not been his habit before with his First Actresses,' murmured Dudley Moore, as she passed on to the stage again. 'If it had been, he would not have had them to lend now. If this child understands her *droits de largesse* the Beltran diamonds are lost to the house.'

I thought that, with all his knowledge of human nature, the great critic did not very much understand Gladys Gerant.

When the comedy was over I found my way to that pretty chamber over which the marble god and dancing girl of Goethe presided. When I entered it was empty; but the chandelier was lighted, and on the table stood some ice, and wines, and fruits. Supper was rarely had here now, except on occasions when its lessee himself entertained after the first representation of a new piece, or on the opening night of the season. But she was accustomed to receive here, for an hour or so after her performance, all personal friends or persons of celebrity. The number of these was kept exclusively and carefully narrowed; and the *cordon* that was drawn around this place was quite as rigid in its way as that before the doors of a great duchess's drawing-room.

I had scarcely been there a moment ere Beltran and Denzil entered together. They had been dining with the Duke of Holyrood. Dudley Moore, Guilliadene, and one or two others followed; chatted of the gossip of the hour; lighted some rose-scented cigars; and drank some of the hissing iced waters.

In a little while she joined them, dressed in that simple black velvet, without jewel or ornament of any sort, except here and there a touch of old point lace, which always became her, I thought, almost better than any other fashion of attire.

The fire burned brightly, whilst its rosy glow beamed on the marble beauty of the god; the scent of the bouquets placed there in glass and china filled the air; the news of the hour passed laughingly from mouth to mouth; now and then Denzil struck out from the piano in the recess some deep full chords of German melody, or some half-gay, half-

pathetic cadence of soft Irish song. It was all pleasant, amusing, blameless enough; but I suppose it would have been vain to tell the town that the society gathered round an actress in her supper-room was to the full as refined as, and not a whit more harmful than, the society gathered round a young peeress at her afternoon tea-table.

'The exception proves the rule,' runs your proverb; but why, I wonder, is it that you always only believe in the rule, and are always utterly sceptical as to the existence of the exception?

'Why are people still amused by Sheridan, but always bored by Shakespeare?' propounded the mighty Editor, as Denzil brought to a close a buffo song of some Neapolitan composer, in which his voice had filled the room with melody.

'Why do people only tolerate Sheridan, and go into ecstasies over burlesques?' said Beltran.

'Because we want to laugh, and not to think,' said Denzil. 'Now, to laugh at Sheridan, you must first think with him.'

'That is begging the question,' said Dudley Moore. 'I don't want to know what the great mass of fools may do; I want to know why people of intelligence and taste, who fully appreciate the riches of Shakespeare when they read him, are bored—undeniably bored—by him on the stage?'

He turned to Gladys and she smiled.

'They will come to my Beatrice.'

'No answer! They come because you look like a picture; though they might prefer even your picture if set in Offenbach. What I ask is, why is Shakespeare a drug on the English stage, ennui to audiences, and perdition to managers?'

'If it be so, I think it is this: the Shakespearian plays are all so utterly unlike our own life—it is so utterly impossible that men and women could ever have spoken such verse as that—their words and deeds are so immeasurably removed from all kindred with the language and the actions of this present time—that when called from the world of the imagination, and presented visibly on the stage, they weary the audience where they do not strike it with an irresistible sense of incongruity and ridicule. It would be the same with any of the great dramas of antiquity—with those of Euripides or Sophocles, if we could play them. The

more cultured the mind, the more impatient does it grow of any attempt to clothe in palpable shape any of the sublime ideals of a great poet. Besides, surprise and expectation are charms essential to the drama for all minds. How is it possible for people to be either excited or surprised by plays that they have been more or less familiar with ever since they learned to spell?'

'That is partially true,' said Dudley Moore. 'I am disposed to agree with you, that high culture makes the visible personation of a poetic ideal both distasteful and vulgar. High culture needs no aids to its imagination. But why, then, do the French, the most cultivated people as a whole of the world, still care so much for their Phèdre and its like?'

'The French are naturally more declamatory than we are,' said Beltran. 'Attitude and sublime diction do not strike them with the same sense of unnaturalness that it strikes us. They are always *posing*, in school life, in home life, in public life. Besides, the workmen flock to see Racine, specially when Racine is to be had gratis; but the idle people have much the same preference for Hervé and Offenbach that we have.'

'And it is ridiculous to quote the French,' averred Denzil, 'in any sort of dramatic contrast with us. Though they have not, to my thinking, one poetic drama in their language, except Victor Hugo's, they have excellences of every other kind—in the intellectual, the social, the satirical play, they are unapproachable.'

'And then such power of adaptation in their actors!' pursued Beltran. 'Such mutations, such ease, such effortless eloquence, such inimitable art! If we had such actors, we might perhaps tempt some English Hugo or Sardou to give his talents to the stage, instead of to the novel or the dinner-table. As it is, no genius or wit will write for our stage, on which he knows but too well that his gentlemen will be represented by counter-jumpers, his repartees be given with grins and "gag," and his good society be rendered by a *replica* of Margate or Cremorne.'

'All this,' said the Editor doggedly, 'chiefly brings us back to Denzil's first proposition, that most educated people dislike to think, *ergo*, are fools. A curious fact, if true, and not in favour of education.

'I deny your deduction. It may be because we think

over-much—in our science, our profession, our jurisprudence, our intellectual composition, our political career, or whatever be the pursuit which we follow—that we are disinclined to think in a place of mere amusement, after our dinners.'

'It would seem, then, that the decline of the drama resolves itself into a mere question of eating.'

'You are very perverse,' said Denzil. 'What I say is, that the mind is always so highly strained at its work in our day, that it refuses to make any additional effort in its mere relaxations. When you have been thinking all day, with little pause or peace, you do not want to think in the evening, when your mental strain is relaxed. You want light, gaiety, noise, pretty pictures—something that needs no thought whatever.'

'And culture, though it have heightened one kind of imagination, has deadened another. And it has also sharpened the sense of ridicule,' said Gladys. 'In the old time, people wept for Imogen, and loved with Romeo, without any one of the aids to fancy of what we call "scenic effect." But now you would only laugh at the most poetic Juliet if she played as she did of old, with a sign-post behind her that said, "This is Verona." And even with all the aids of admirable scenery, how seldom you seem to forget for one moment that you are sitting out a play! How seldom we can beguile you into the sweetest homage to us of all—delusion!'

'I don't think *you* need say so,' said Beltran. 'But I admit it is difficult. We are not imaginative—in that way. We are moved more now-a-days indirectly—by suggestion, by illusion, by a line in a poem, a meaning in a picture, a gleam of insight in a writer, than we are by the broader and more direct appeals to our fancy of the drama. A generation which has found out that the moon is only a dried-up ball, and the Ultima Thule only a bit of water; that Wallace never lived, and Joan of Arc never died, may be pardoned for not very easily yielding itself to delusions.'

'And therefore burlesques on delusions suit us best,' said Denzil. 'When we feel tickled at hearing Medea bawl that she'll whip her children, or Œdipus smash his tinted spectacles in a passion, we are amused, because, without

knowing it, we feel a comical likeness, in such caricatures, with the strong tendency of our own time to dwarf all heroism, and make absurd all dignities.'

'That sounds fearfully subtle, Derry,' said Beltran; 'but I doubt if audiences like burlesques for any other reason than because they are nonsensical, showy, and full of jingling rhymes and catching music. And why shouldn't they like them? They can't be less intellectual than the old Farce was; and certainly they are much prettier.'

'All this,' cried Dudley Moore, 'does not answer my question, "Why does Sheridan keep his ground so much better than Shakespeare?"'

'She answered you as to Shakespeare,' replied Beltran. 'As for Sheridan, he amuses us because his satires suit us so well still, and his characters are our own people disguised in wig and powder. Our society is artificial, passionless, insincere. So is his. He is a mirror in which we see our own faces; it is the costume only that differs.'

'But we should not be driven to use a mirror sixty years old, if there were any quicksilver of wit extant wherewith to set up another,' said Dudley Moore. 'If the English stage be ever again to be worth anything—which I doubt lies not in its destinies—it must be rendered so, not by revivals of *King John* or of *Comus*, but by plays which shall faithfully show, and unscrupulously satirise, modern society. Our society is never represented on the stage. We have steam-engines, fire-engines, police-courts, gin-palaces, cabs and horses, pots and pans, all to the life, inimitably; but Society, *our* Society—that wonderful mass of indifference, intelligence, ennui, energy, licentiousness, decorum, corruption, and conventionality—is utterly unrepresented. On not one single stage do we ever see anything even dimly resembling the life of men and women of the world. Now, this must indicate one of two things: either that the power of satire and of representation is altogether dead, or that it finds in literature the vent that half a century ago it found upon the stage.'

'The latter, no doubt,' said Denzil.

'You think so, of course, as you write novels,' assented the great censor. 'But there is another reason, too—Society, like most fashionable dames, is fond of self-delusion, and is very apt to break in shivers the mirror that

reflects her *décolletée* too faithfully. Now the novelist is a painter who draws his portrait on canvas which a stone or two of censure will not break; but the playwright's fragile glass falls to atoms unless braced in a gilded frame of popularity. Critical hostility is often the breath of life to the writer: but to the actor it is absolute damnation—'

'How many have you damned then?'

'Ah!' said Dudley Moore, taking snuff with an air of pleasant remembrance.

'What a deal of words they waste over it!' scoffed Fanfreluche to me. 'I said all that they've been saying now a great deal better to you the other day in two minutes. The simple truth of the matter is that human beings love mere fun, mere prettiness, and a sprinkling of indecencies, all of which burlesques supply—only they hate a truth so; when it shows them just a little silly, and just a little childish, despite all their worshipful wisdom!'

I did not heed her much. I was lost in wonder that the child whom I had first seen with her dead bluebells, unpitied in the streets of Westminster, should have become this elegant actress, with her grace, her ease, her ready interchange of thought, her patrician calm of manner.

It was only when I saw the old childlike innocence in the eyes, the old childlike trustfulness in the beautiful arched mouth, that I could persuade myself she was in truth the same. And yet I remembered even then, in her helplessness, and her bewilderment, and her wistful, defenceless misery, there had been a certain noble pride, a certain grave repose, in this young daughter of an old Saxon race, whose forefathers had ruled as Earldermen ere ever a stone had been raised of Windsor or Warwick, of Longeat or Haddon. Race is stronger than circumstance. She had been reared in the severe simplicity of a yeoman's household, and amidst the harsh pains and privations of poverty; blown on by the winds of earth, sunned by the morning's rays, and drenched with the dews of the dawns, trusted to the freedom and the instincts of an open-air and hardy life; knowing not the world, nor the world knowing her; having no teachers save Shakespeare and Milton, save the sunrise and sunset, save the flocks and the herds. And yet Race had conquered Accident, and vindicated her title to it—in every limb and lineament; in every motion and gesture;

in the accents of her voice, in the gaze of her eyes. The world may give costume, beauty, brilliancy, beguilement, many charms, many attractions; but Race alone can give—the hands, the glance, and the voice.

'Have you found out what she is to him, my dear?' grinned Fanfreluche that night.

'What do people say?' I asked cautiously.

'As if there were two opinions!—My dear—is it possible for a woman not twenty, without any sort of kith or kin; famous on the stage; living alone, in a charming villa with only men of rank for her companions, rich enough to drive in her own carriage and to give her own dinners—is it possible for her to have any verdict save one pronounced on her by Society?'

'Society's verdicts are often unjust?'

'Perhaps. But Society is a Vehm-Gericht from whose sentences there is no appeal. You may have all the innocence in life, yet if the dagger stick through you and the red hand point at you, why—your innocence is very little odds to anybody.'

'But I am sure—'

'What's the good of buts, my dear? If people choose to occupy questionable positions, they shouldn't murmur because Society looks on them as questionable characters. The lamb that wore a wolf's skin couldn't with justice complain if its flock ran away aghast from it.'

'But, with Society, it is the wolves who pretend to be horrified at what they know well to be a lamb, much purer than they themselves are!'

'Ah well! Then that only shows what a fool the lamb is not to become a wolf altogether—fangs as well as skin—and so get a brotherhood with the strong ones! Nothing is so bad for a woman as to *be* innocent and to *look* guilty; she gets the sympathies of neither side, and finds herself out in the cold altogether.'

'You believe Gladys only slandered, then?'

'My dear, I have seen moths in candles that were only singed,—to begin with!'

'But he is so gentle to her, so generous to her!'

Fanfreluche grinned.

'Did ever you hear of the hawk who took into his protection a wood dove? There was not a question but that

Milord the hawk could, better than any one else, preserve her from all the perils of the woods; all traps, and nets, and gins; all ambuscaded sportsmen, all wandering night-owls, and above all, from all the wiles and ways of hawks themselves, for who should know these so well? And yet—when one fine day Milord the hawk took the fancy of a nice dove for his own eating, I am half afraid she did not find herself to be in such perfect security after all!'

'Beltran has no such treachery in him!'

'My dear, he has been a hawk all his days, and it can't be supposed that he can change his nature. Birds of prey never do.'

I soon came to know that Fanfreluche was right. Of the relation of Gladys to her friend the town had but one opinion.

It judged from the surface, as it always does judge—therefore fallaciously. Appearances are so and so, hence facts must be so and so likewise, is Society's formula. This sounds mathematical and accurate; but as facts, nine times out of ten, belie appearances, the logic is very false. There is something, indeed, comically stupid in your satisfied belief in the surface of any parliamentary or public facts that may be presented to you, varnished out of all likeness to the truth by the suave periods of writer or speaker. But there is something tragically stupid about your dogged acceptation of any social construction of a private life, damned out of all possibility of redemption by the flippant deductions of chatterbox or of slanderer.

Now and then you poor humanities, who are always so dimly conscious that you are all lies to one another, get a glimpse of various truths from some cynical dead man's diary, or some statesman's secret papers. But you never are warned: you placidly continue greedily to gobble up, unexamined, the falsehoods of public men; and impudently to adjudicate on the unrevealed secrets of private lives.

Ah, if *we* could write your archives!—we who lie under your council-chambers, and sleep by your emperor's pillows, and watch your statesmen in the dead of the night, and see your mistresses in their solitude, and hear your absent friends when they speak of you, what a revelation there would be! I scarce can decide which you would find the falser, your mistress's kiss or your newspaper's news. I hardly

know which would be the more at variance with their professions, the friend's opinion or the statesman's soliloquy. I do not think that any two members of society would keep on speaking terms; I doubt very greatly if any two lovers would remain in love; but there would be very few wars conjured up, I fancy, because leading articles would go out of fashion; and there could hardly remain any political differences, because you would see that all political creeds resolve themselves into the old moss-trooper's formula,—'Grab a' ye may, an' fire the rest!'

Could I have told the town that there was no life simpler tha this of Gladys Gerant's; that there was no honour higher than that of this yeoman's daughter; that her friend had never touched even her hand with his lips; that although a beautiful and courted celebrity, she hardly knew more of the world's evil now than when she had been in her father's homestead; that of the darker lines of her career she had no knowledge, but lived in an idealic sphere of fair faiths and of golden fancies; could I have told them this—the mere truth, as I came to find it—none would have believed me.

And yet the truth it was. Life had opened before her like a dazzling wonder flower; and she had taken it without question, and rejoiced in it without fear.

As I came to know later, Beltran had glided imperceptibly into his present relations with her. His pity had been first aroused for the helpless, lonely, graceful child; there had been much in her to charm the taste of a fastidious and cynical man of the world; he had been interested, which was not with him of common occurrence; and he had discovered in her singular abilities, which it had pleased him to develop. His first gifts to her he had induced her to accept by leading her to believe them the fruits of her brother's talent; when it was no longer possible to sustain this delusion, he had placed her in a career where he could continue them to her as the fruits of her own gifts. As it chanced, her success in that career proved singularly great; yet not so great that it could, of itself, have brought her in so brief a space all the pleasures and all the luxuries which he contrived she should enjoy.

Owing to him she never traversed all the steep and weary steps of that winding stairway of struggle and privation by

which most actresses are forced to toil. She never knew the bitterness of probation, the fury of adverse cliques, the insults of opposition, the slow agony of humiliating ordeal; all the antagonism, annoyance, and insult inseparable to her career, were warded off from her, and whatever he might encounter of them, none of it touched her. From the first he had led her to look to him for the guidance of her life; from the first he had never allowed her to suppose that any of the gold she received was his. The wage of the theatre was paid to her in his treasurer's name; she never knew that he owned the house; but she believed that his interest obtained her honours. From her youth and her ignorance of all practical things he had taken the management of her affairs and interests entirely to himself. When he told her that she was rich by right of genius, she believed him, and only felt that such riches had charming uses and gracious ends.

Perhaps he had done unwisely in thus bringing her into the midst of the world, with no more knowledge of the world than a child gains from a tale of fairyland. Perhaps in the very excess of his liberality to her he erred against her. It was not a safe life for her; none knew that better than he. It was a life, moreover, whereby her name was inevitably associated with his own in injury to her. But it had been hardly possible for him to give her any other. From the onset he had found this young creature resolute to receive no aid save such as she could be brought to believe that she had really earned. Finding in her both grace and genius, he judged it the simplest and straightest service to her to give these free scope. By her absolute desolation her fate was cast into his hands entirely; he dealt with it after the fashion of a man's liberal judgment and kindly indulgence; naturally he did not regulate it by a matron's prejudices or with a philosoper's severity.

He had ever seen the women about him surrounded with elegance, pleasure, and pretty luxuriouness; he gave her these because they appeared to him the privileges of her sex and youth; and because a lavishness in giving was a characteristic of his temper. But in all this he had been moved by the generous impulses of a gentleman; never by those cold, measured calculations of a libertine which society attributed to him.

When he had endeavoured to induce women of his own class to take interest in her, he had been baffled by their indifference or their incredulity, and could make no impression either on their coldness or their scepticism. All things had combined to throw her straight into his power. That he did not abuse that power was, to my thinking, a gleam of purer gold in the tangled web of this man's life than many more virtuous men, of better repute than he, can show in theirs. He was careless, contemptuous, indifferent, hardened in many things; holding women lightly, and setting most moralities at naught, after the manner of men of his kind. He had never been a good man, as the world counts such. He had wasted his possessions, spent his years in pleasures, and gained himself an evil name, often perhaps, for evil he had not done; but of old, when I had first seen the kindly smile gleam in his tired grey eyes, I had known that he was more to be trusted than very many better men, and that no living thing would ever place its faith in him in vain. And even so she now had found it.

With women of the world he was as unscrupulous as occasion might need; with other men's wives he had never been famed for discretion; his loves had had very little heart in them, and as little scruple. He had been quite capable of forsaking with easy negligence at the end of the season the same woman whom he had wooed with courtly beguilement at the commencement of it; some women indeed, they said, had found that gentle manner hard as steel, and that slight smile cutting as the north wind. But all this was but Greek meeting Greek; all these women were much as world-worn and as heartless as he, if they were more passionate and more tenacious. If here and there one of them had staked her life on his, the stake had seemed to have but little worth in it, because she who put it down was so inveterate a gamester, and had so often ventured 'all upon a cast.'

But many a man has honour who has not morality; many a man can be touched into generosity when he cannot be induced to care for duty; and he who smiles at all other religions may yet steadfastly obey the instinct which forbids him to abuse faith placed in him.

Such a man was he; and being moreover of a temper that, when once moved to do either never gave measuredly or

defended feebly, he had lavished all things possible on Gladys Gerant, and from the first time that her innocent eyes had met his own had dealt with her gently, reverently, purely: breathing no word to her that her dead boy-brother, living, could ever have needed to avenge.

Fanfreluche had said that birds of prey cannot change their natures; and, doubtless, you will say that it is entirely improbable that such a man could ever act thus by such a woman.

Well, I can only answer you as a little while ago I heard a novelist, as famous in the drawing-room as on cover-side and moor-side, answer his companion, when she demonstrated to him that one of his stories—a love-story, which has thrilled the hearts of many—was, charming as she and the word found it, after all very improbable.

'Improbable?' he repeated. 'Improbable? Yes, no doubt it is—utterly improbable, Only, you see, it happens to be all true, every word of it. But I don't know that that makes much difference—to your theory.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'THE WOMAN AT THE LATTICE.'

'THE morality of society is very beautiful. Look there.' said Fanfreluche.

It was a mild noon in March, there were sables and seal-skins in the Row, but the wearers thereof were already numerous and aristocratic, and along the rails there already stood some score of dainty equipages, all with fretting horses, and some with coroneted panels.

The east still prevailed in the drift of the wind, but the ennui had departed from the smoking-rooms of the clubs. There might still be frost on the pavements, but there was fashion in the footsteps that touched them. The spring had scarce put forth her primroses, but Christie had put forth his porcelains. The chestnuts had hardly their buds yet in embryo, but the studios had already their paintings in maturity. There were few leaves uncurled on the trees, but there were several dinner-parties given in Belgravia. The mignonettes had not begun to sprout in the window-boxes, but the love intrigues had commenced their up-springing.

London was at its pleasantest season, when dinners are few enough to be charming; when little suppers succeed an hour or two in the stalls; when the afternoon tea gathers its chit-chat round a fire; when men and women have leisure to make amusement a pastime and not a toil; when the great race meetings are still distant enough not to absorb every thought and word; when the pictures of the year are only vaguely known by tradition and prophecy breathed from private views; when scandal, and laughter, and flirtation, and gossip, all are unjaded; and when the soul of the cook, if it breathe a sigh for its game-loves departed, is yet filled with a soft glow of comfort before its visions of salmon and quails, its possessions of lamb and asparagus.

'Look where?' I asked her as we passed together down the Row, where my mistress, alighting from her brougham, was walking awhile, accompanied by Beltran and Guilliadene; all who passed her turning to look at that delicate face with the gleam of its golden hair, and the flush which the wind brought to its skin, set in the dark softness of sables, and velvets, and laces, as the bright hues of a porcelain painting may be set in an ebony frame.

'Everywhere,' returned Fanfreluche comprehensively. 'Look round, my dear, at them all. Look at that pretty woman in chinchilla and violet. That is Lady Hilda St. Maurice, who is not two-and-twenty, and who has had more "affairs" already than there are rings in her dressing-case. Last year I lived with her a few weeks; one day at luncheon time, Colonel St. Maurice, her husband, you know, walked in to her with all her letters to Charles Flickers, the actor, in his hand. Dollie Flickers, his wife, who is horribly jealous of him on and off the boards, had got at them somehow, and had sent them on to St. Maurice. Hilda never winced once, though he made a scene out of it. "Do be sensible, Frank," she said when he'd stormed himself hoarse, she all the while sublimely indifferent. "People who live in glass houses, you know—how would *you* look if we had a 'show-up'?" And she ate a greengage as she spoke: and the Colonel was "sensible;" and Lady Hilda went next day to the Drawing-room, as she will go next year.

'Look, now, at that haughty piece of dark still beauty in her carriage: that is the Countess of Gracedieu. With

her blue blood, and her immense possessions, and her stainless name, she is the very type of the lofty and chaste aristocrat. Well, I have lived with her too; and if I spoke their tongue, and told of things that I have seen as I lay in my lady's private rooms when all the great house was still, they might maybe find that the days when Faustine called her paramour from the circus to the palace were franker and not deeply darker than ours.

'Look, too, at that graceful creature so exquisitely painted, and dressed up to the eyes in the imperial sables; that is the Duchess of Llandrysyl. She, the greatest of great ladies, has royalty in her veins; has revived the salon; and got her husband the vacant ribbon. People say that his grace is a gloomy, taciturn, listless, discourteous man, ill worthy of his matchless wife. An autumn or two since my people stayed at her magnificent domain in North Wales, and I with them. One evening before dinner his voice woke me in the great, dusky, splendid library; I listened; he was there, alone, with his wife. I heard enough to pity from my soul for evermore that great noble, who was more wretched than any cotter on his lands. And yet he held his peace, has always held it, so that the bright-haired lad that will reign after him, the only child of them all that has any look of his face or his race, may never know the truth of the mother who bore him.

'Look there, too, at that lovely, passionless-looking blonde, with all that guipure about her; that is Ida Warwick. Dudley Warwick is a baronet's son, very poor, very idle, very—goodnatured! He has about 500*l.* a year—and debts. Ida, a peer's daughter, has nothing—and debts. Yet they keep a charming little house in Belgravia; give very good dinners; have the first of fruits and the choicest of wines; two high-stepping bays and an opera-box; and their creditors never trouble them. How do they do it? Well, the Duke of Holyrood's bankers could tell, and handsome Holy's presence is a thing of course in the bijou house. But, then, Ida is quite "in society;" her children are cherubs; her own people are fond of her; her husband lives with her. What more would you want to please all the Proprieties? O, it is a beautiful thing this morality of English Society! Look around, my dear, and only reflect that not one of these women whom I have

named, and not one of their set or their order, but would deem her fair fame polluted, and her fair dignity insulted, if only asked to know—Gladys Gerant!'

She spoke the truth: the truth not only of those few, but of many as corrupt as themselves, and of many more whose lives were really just, and whose honour was really honourable.

As Gladys passed under the leafless boughs the women of his world looked away from her, with that serene passionless look which *ignores*, and which is far colder as it is far courtlier than any scorn. She herself, vaguely conscious of its insult but unconscious of its meaning, gave back the look with a grave proud meditation in her eyes. She dimly felt that all the women of his order held themselves aloof from her; she thought it was because she publicly pursued an art for fame, and because she came of an old, humble, impoverished race, whose decay all, and whose ancientness none, had known.

Of the truth she had no nearer conception; all men who came near her dealt with her with an infinite respect; she did not dream that the mothers, and wives, and sisters of these men classed her with all that was basest and most venal. She knew that there were vile women; often she heard men talk of them; there were even those in her own theatre with whom he had requested her not even to exchange speech. But her knowledge of such was still vague. She thought scarcely at all of them save with a shuddering tender compassion. That she was classed amidst them never dawned, by its faintest suspicion, on her.

She was conscious of no sin; she was proud by nature; she was content in his protection and his friendship; she was of a temper to which the mingled isolation and publicity of her life added both strength and sweetness; she only knew the world as he chose to show it her: that in the estimation of that world she was no better than Maude Delamere, no higher than Lillian Lee, no purer than Laura Pearl, was a fact that never brought its indignity within the scope of her sight or the sphere of her thoughts.

And she went now in the sunny noon of the still wintry morning, with her graceful head turned to him in happy careless speech, and a wild-rose flush brought to her cheeks by the wind; and her eyes glancing, clear as a deer's,

dauntless as a child's, dreamy as a poet's, at the sneering, smiling faces of those women of whom he had forbidden her to have any knowledge; and at the cold, immutable countenances of those other women who had refused to have any knowledge of herself.

I think there was something in that look which baffled, perplexed, annoyed both classes of these her foes; for as I followed her I heard one of the former mutter with a laugh, noting the delicate warmth which the wind had fanned in her face, 'Has to rouge a'ready, by daylight!—bet Fred Bruce a pound o' cigars that she did!' And I heard one of the latter murmur to a friend, noting the worth of the almost priceless black Chantilly which she had gathered about her, 'How they do imitate all laces now; did you see that? You would almost think it was real!'

Now I believe that when a woman's own fair skin is called rouge, and her own old lace is called imitation, she must in some way or other have roused sharply the conscience or envy of her sisters who sit in judgment.

Fanfreluche and I, as we ran, caught many such little phrases from the peripatetics of the Row. Almost all whom we passed had some word or another as they saw her.

'Is that the great actress?' said a country cousin with a stare. 'How young she looks!'

'They know how to make themselves look young when they are seventy!' said her companion, who no doubt was a woman that knew the world.

'I wonder who she really was?' said a man who had the look of the Rag about him.

'Don't you know?' said his friend arm-in-arm with him. 'She was the natural daughter of the old Duke of Holyrood by an opera-singer. I can see a likeness in her to the young Duke myself.'

'So can I, now you name it,' responded his ally. 'But I have heard so many stories that—'

'O, this is the perfect truth,' interrupted the other. 'I had it from a man who used to know old Holyrood very intimately.'

'Is that she?' asked a handsome young girl very eagerly. 'O, I never saw a real actress out of doors before! Somebody told me they were always so yellow by daylight. But she is as fair—'

'As you are,' added the man with her, apparently her brother. 'Actresses are the prettiest women we have. "My face is my fortune, sir, she said," is true of an actress, if not of the traditional milkmaid of the song.'

'O, if I were but as lovely!' sighed the girl, who could only have been 'just out,' and unspoiled by lovers and ladies'-maids. 'And what beautiful furs, and what exquisite lace! Ah, I am so glad you have got those stalls for to-night! And it is such a pretty name too—Gladys Gerant. Is it really her name?'

'Heavens, no! I daresay her real name's Mary Stubb, or Martha Grubb, or something as euphonious,' laughed the brother, moving her onward.

'Who is she really?' murmured an elegant woman, whom I knew to be Lady Cississiter, to her companion, who had the look of a bow-window frequenter.

'God knows!' he responded. 'Last thing they say is that her father's one of Beltran's gamekeepers; and that the keeper cut up rough about dishonour and all that, and got firing at him from a cover, Irish fashion, last time he was down at his own place. Keeper missed him by a hair's breadth; and is put away somewhere in an asylum. Wish we could do as much by the Ribbonmen.'

'Very romantic!' said Lady Cississiter with a little incredulous contempt. 'What sables those are she has! Really, how preposterous!—'

Whether she meant the keeper's vengeance, or the sables' worth, I know not, for she also passed onward.

'My stars, what lace!' muttered Lillian Lee, putting up her eyeglass as she checked her horse by the rails. 'By Jove, Jack, the virtuous dodge seems uncommon good to go in for—'

'I wouldn't try it if I were you,' said John Beaudesert who rode with her. 'You wouldn't look the part—quite.'

'Beatrice Leintwardine has had an awful row with him. They'll never speak again,' said a Guardsman, meaning the Countess of Leintwardine, Beltran's sister.

'About the property?' said another, who was arm-in-arm with him. 'I daresay she's fidgety. He's got rid of all he can: and her second boy's in the entail, you know.'

'O, hang it, no! About the diamonds,' answered the first speaker. 'He's given the Beltran diamonds to that girl, and the Leintwardines are furious.'

'The deuce! that's a new trick,' murmured his friend. 'Awfully pleasant. All St. John's-wood and Brompton will be flying at one's family jewels now; I'm sorry he's put it into their heads. All the racing-plate and shooting-shields will have to go next, I suppose.'

'That's begun. Last season Mrs. Delamere asked poor old Brune to lend her his St. Leger cup for her sideboard at one of her big dinners—'

'O, Lord, yes, I remember. And when he sent for it next day she wrote him word back that she "never returned gifts if people pleased to repent of them." He raved; talked of law—'

'But he never went to law, and the vase is the Delamere's now.'

'Did you get that box at the Coronet for to-morrow, Charlie?' asked a handsome matron of a handsome youth.

'Couldn't, aunt. Everything taken for a fortnight. Put our name down. But you can see her for nothing here—look.'

'I never look at that class of persons,' said the handsome woman severely.

'And yet you send me to take a box on purpose to look at her!'

'Don't be stupid, Charlie. That is on the stage. That is quite different.'

'Who was she *really?*' asked a pretty dainty widow in pearl grays and swansdown: the fortieth time that I heard the same question asked in three turns of the Row.

'Well—really—I believe the story is this,' returned the man with her. 'She was the wife of a poor devil of a painter, who married her when she was fifteen. Viscount Beltran met them at Dresden, where they were living in great wretchedness; took a fancy to her; and entered in to an agreement to bring her out on the stage her, and pay the husband five hundred a year to absent himself. But they do say that the husband is waxing wroth because she makes so much money, and that we shall have the divorce on, and the whole story out before long.'

'Dear me!' sighed the widow, who evidently thought simplicity her own great point. 'But that seems a very wicked thing of Lord Beltran!'

'I never heard a good thing of him. It is hardly so bad

as some others I could tell you,' said the speaker, who, as I found afterwards, was a young clerk at the War-office, who knew Beltran about as much as he knew the Queen—by sight.

'Pray don't!' murmured the widow. 'But how does it come, then, that she has the same name as that pretty green book you bought me. I thought somebody said she was the poor boy's sister?'

'Pooh! The boy's dead; he can't contradict them if they do. But it is all bosh. She is the wife of this painter in Dresden. McGilp, who is studying in Dresden, told me so. The name's a mere *nom de fantaisie*, picked out of the poems.'

And they also passed on, amidst the chit-chat, the cigar-smoke, the perfumes, and the gay dresses, under the scarcely budding boughs of Rotten Row.

'Mercy on me!' said Fanfreluche. 'And to think all these people devoutly believe what they say! That is what is so comical. When Libel lies for a purpose it is comprehensible, if criminal; but when Gossip lies from mere wantonness it is such an awful fool; for pretending to have the eyes of an Argus it has all the blindness of a bat!'

'And yet you once said that the scandals of society, if false in the letter, are often true in the spirit,' I said, for I loved to twit her with her own would-be smart sayings.

'I never said anything so foolish,' snapped Fanfreluche. 'What I did say was, that if you haven't the story you ought to have; society always supplies you with it, as a good corset-maker supplies a poor lath of a girl with a comely figure. If you occupy an equivocal position, you clearly ought to have an equivocal history. Supposing you are really innocent, and have not one, society weaves one for you, suitable in every respect, if not comfortable.'

'A fire web for the glance it enfolds,' I murmured. 'Is it true that Lady Leintwardine has quarrelled about the diamonds? She used to be very attached to her brother.'

'*Could* they speak truth here?' retorted Fanfreluche. 'No—it was not about the diamonds. Beatrice Leintwardine is far too much of a gentlewoman to dispute about *them*. It was one day last month, in the railway-carriage. Beltran and she had been down with her boy, Beaulieu, to Eton, and coming back—we were alone—she took him to

task about having old Margett Llansaint living with "that girl," as she called Gladys Gerant; and went so far as to lament that she herself could never take any notice of faithful old Margett now that he had placed her under the same roof with—with—she did not quite finish her sentence. Beltran was looking straight at her; and he has a way of doing that which often incommodes people. When she paused he answered her very quietly, "My dear Beatrice," said he, "I suppose even brothers and sisters may know each other for over forty years and be strangers all the time. Since you fancy I could turn my dead mother's old servant into a pander to my vices, the less you see of me the better, I fancy. I'll order Beau's new boat, and look after him down there—good-day to you." And as the train stopped just then at a station he got out, lit a cigar, and went into a smoking-carriage. He has never spoken to her since then, and to the best of my belief never will speak to her. And yet he is much attached to Lady Leintwardine.

'Did he ever ask her to know Gladys?'

'Yes, he did. He tried hard when the child first came out—and before, I think—to make the women of his own family feel some interest in her. But they were stubborn, and would not do so much as see her; and you know very well that he is not a man who will ask twice.'

'And yet she is as innocent as their own little children that are at play in their homes,' I cried indignantly; for by this time I had come to the sure knowledge that, howsoever it might look in the sight of the world, this life was stainless.

'What's that to do with it, my dear?' retorted Fanfreluche. 'She is an actress.'

'But still there are men who will believe in her?—men beside himself?'

'Ah, my dear,' Fanfreluche replied with much energy; 'but don't you know that whilst broad, intellectual, scepticism is masculine, narrow, social scepticism is feminine? To get hearty, reverent, genuine belief in the innocence of a slandered woman, go to a man: where the world has once doubted, women, the world-worshippers, will for ever after doubt also. You can never bring women to see that the pecked-at fruit is always the richest and sweetest; they always take the benison of the wooing bird to be the malison of the hidden worm!'

Which metaphoric sentence seemed to please her, for she shook her golden bells, and went to gossip with the arrogant Astolat poodle.

A little later there passed us, going to her carriage, a very handsome woman, with gleaming hazel eyes, and a haughty languid mouth.

'That was Lady Otho,' I cried to Fanfreluche when she rejoined me.

'Yes, my dear. There is nothing between them now. Two autumns ago he went to Africa and she went to Rome. He potted maneaters and she *monsignori*. Love died a natural death with absence; and when they met, with the next London season, they agreed by tacit consent to bury it decently in pretty cere-clothes of courtesy. Love used to die violent deaths, you know, in the old times of passion and poignards; but now-a-days its common disease is that gentle form of atrophy called *ennui*, and it yawns itself softly out of existence, polite and *bien posé* to the last, like the moribund beauty who asked for fresh ruffles and rouge ere she took the last sacrament, and drew the last breath.'

'He never cared much for her?' said I.

'He never cared much for anybody. And that is why all of them care so much for him. Men of the world, to whom their loves are about as much account as their cigarettes, get all the worship and all the devotion. 'How can you care so awfully for me, Effie? You know I care nothing about you," I heard a man of that sort say once to a woman who had clung to him for years, with a vehement adoration which moved him with a little gratitude and a great deal of *ennui*. "I know you don't, dear," she answered him humbly; "but I think that is just why I do care for you. You see men who love us much, always look such fools to us." And she spoke with knowledge, for many much better and wiser than he had loved her.'

'And yet you sometimes say men love more truly than women?'

'So they do. I have seen fifty instances of it. But it is true that their strongest loves are not always their most legitimate. "The wife" may be poetised about and preached about; it is not always *she* of whom he thinks when he lies wide awake on a brown moonlit moor, or dull with fever in a hot sulphurous eastern city; but oftener of

some fair sweet fate that might have been, or of some fond dead thing that loved him with tenderest unwisdom.' And I think she was right.

Not very long ago I was down away in the vale of Belvoir. I stayed with my friends at a great stately place, owned by as gallant a gentleman as ever swung himself into saddle. His wife was a beautiful woman, and he treated her with the courtliest tenderness: indeed, I often heard their union cited as one of almost unequalled felicity. 'He never had a thought that he did not tell me,' I heard his wife once say to a friend. 'Not a single thought, I know, all these twelve years of our marriage.' It was a happy belief—many women have the like—but it was an unutterably foolish one; for the minds of the best and truest amongst you are, in many things, as sealed books to those whom you care for the most.

One bitter, black hunting-day, a day keen and cold, with frost, as men feared, in the air, and with the ground so hard that even the Duke's peerless 'dandies,' perfect hounds though they are, scarcely could keep the scent, there came terrible tidings to the Hall—he had met with a crashing fall. His horse had refused at timber, and had fallen upon him, kicking his head with the hind hoofs repeatedly. They had taken him to the nearest farmhouse, insensible; even dead already, they feared. His wife and the elder amongst the beautiful children fled like mad creatures across the brown fallows and the drear blackened meadows. The farm, happily, was not far: I sped with them.

When they reached him he was not quite lifeless, but he knew none of them; his head had been beaten in by the plates of the kicking hoofs; and they waited for his death with every moment, in the little old dusky room, with its leaded lattices, and its odour of dried lavender, and its bough of holly above the earth. For this had chanced upon Christmas Eve.

To his wife's agonies, to his children's moans, he was silent: he knew nothing; he lay with closed eyes and crushed brain—deaf, blind, mute. Suddenly the eyes opened, and stared at the red winter sun where it glowed dimly through the squares of the lattice-panes. 'Dolores!' he cried aloud; 'Dolores! Dolores!' It was the name of none there.

'My God! What woman is it he calls?' his wife asked in her torture. But none ever knew. Through half the

night his faint pulse beat, his faint breath came and went; but consciousness never more returned, and for ever he muttered only that one name, that name which was not her own. And when they laid the dead body in its shroud, they found on the left arm above the elbow the words 'Dolores' marked on the skin, as sailors stamp letters in their flesh. But whose it was, or what woe or passion it recorded, none ever knew—not even his wife, who had believed she shared his every thought. And to his grave his dead and secret love went with him.

This man was but a gay, frank, high-spirited gentleman, of no great knowledge, and of no great attainments, riding fearlessly, laughing joyously, living liberally; not a man, one would have said, to know any deep passions, to treasure any bitter memories—and yet he had loved one woman so well that he had never spoken of her, and never forgotten her; never—not even in his death-hour, when the poor, stunned, stifled brain had forgotten all other things of earth.

And so it seems to me that it is very often with you, and that you bear with you through your lifetime the brand of an unforgotten name, branded deep in, in days of passion, that none around you ever wot of, and that the wife who sleeps on your heart never knows.

It is dead—the old love—long dead. And yet, when your last hour shall come, and your senses shall be dizzy with death, the pale loves of the troth and the hearth will fade from you, and this love alone will abide.

At that moment both Fanfreluche and I were summoned; and while Beltran walked homeward, the little brougham, with its pair of small, spirited horses, swept Gladys away to the studio of Marmion Eagle.

Marmion Eagle was as handsome as ever, and had become much more famous; so famous, indeed, that he was almost fashionable, and that where people before had talked of his insanities, they now only murmured of his eccentricities. A man may flirt as wantonly as he will with colour when once the *Midas* has pronounced that his drawing is anatomically perfect, and that his meanings, even when obscure, are always profoundly poetic; and he may indulge as he will in stalking through the Park in an olive velvet Velanquez dress, with a mahl-stick in his hand, and a fez cap on his head, when once it is thoroughly well-known that he goes to

the Premier's At-homes, and is admitted to the dinners of the Duchess of Llandrysyl.

His fair patrician, Gwendoline, had wedded her coronet; and he had locked up in a cabinet the miniature which he had once privily made of her, as he had met her first, when he was a wandering sketcher, under the oaks of her father's park. But she asked him to dinner with great regularity, employed her influence to have his picture hung on the line; and, in fine, got him much talked about. Menus and notoriety are the favourite coins with which Love pays his debts in the nineteenth century.

We were soon at his studio in the heart of the 'wilder west,' where the brethren of the brush do congregate. When last I had known him, his atelier had been a big and barren room, with a few casts and a bronze or two, down somewhere in Chelsea, overlooking the Thames. Now it was placed in an atmosphere that is perfumed with successful talent, and in a suburb where the carriages throng by the hundreds on 'Art Sunday' with every spring. And now the painting-room itself was cedar-panelled, velvet-hung, full of beautiful hues and grand outlines.

So swiftly will the word of the *Midas* and the cards of a Duchess persuade the public that genius is a thing, eccentric no doubt, but still not absolutely damnable—even, indeed, almost deserving of a stockbroker's patronage, and of a millowner's cheques.

Gladys now went to give him her last sitting for a portrait which he had painted of her for that year's exhibition, He had drawn her as the Saxon daughter of Hengist, bearing in her hand the golden mazer, wherewith she bade her lord Vortigern 'Waes heal,' and gave to the high tides and holy-days of England the pledge and custom of the wassail-cup.

The picture was beautiful; and a few great connoisseurs, permitted to see it in progress, had pronounced that it would be the picture of the year, when, with the king-cups and hawthorns of May, the picture exhibition should unclose.

The figure was life-size, clad in white, with no colour at all about it, save in the massive gold cup of wine which she bore; in the purple border of the robe; and in the cool pure blue of a northern sky at noon. The few great connoisseurs talked very grandly, if not very luminously, of this wondrous white; of its purity, of its crystal clearness

exempt from coldness, of its soft shadows that yet were white likewise, and of its admirable management against the azure that alone relieved it. But though they talked thus, the true charm of the picture abode in the face which gazed out of it: the grave, tender, proud, wistful face, with its meditative eyes, and its exquisite hues, and its eloquent mouth, that had all the smile of youth, and all the sorrow of genius.

The portrait was so perfect that I believe the artist only demanded another sitting that he might have the pleasure of noting the light glow on the fair waves of hair, and of seeing the gracious form of the young actress move amongst the dusky magnificence of his atelier.

There was scarcely anything more to be done; but he stood for habit's sake touching this fold, and that detail, whilst Gladys sat on a sort of daïs above, which was hung with maroon-hued velvet, and filled with soft, pale, hothouse roses—for Marmion Eagle had all that love of fragance and beauty of grouping and grace, which is called, not with much wisdom, the effeminacy of genius.

Presently there entered Dudley Moore, who criticised the picture with pungent acerbity, and complimented the original of it with all the suavity of which he could when he chose be master; a little while later there sauntered in Lord Guilliadene, who had been breakfasting with the Guards at Knightsbridge, and who was in his indolent way a dilettante of no mean knowledge or discernment; awhile after there came Beltran himself, bearing with him a small picture, and a very quaint piece of old Capo di Monte, on which he wished for Marmion Eagle's opinion.

Whilst the Capo di Monte passed from hand to hand, he set the picture before Gladys.

She looked long, and did not speak.

'You do not like it!' he exclaimed in some disappointed surprise.

'It is exquisite,' she made answer. 'But it pains me: it is unutterably sad.'

'Nonsense! It is only a little study of pearls and grays; I bought it for its admirable management of half tones.'

'It is sad,' she answered him, 'intensely sad. Look—it is a woman alone; a woman without hope, a woman tired, not by work or years, but by the sickness of hope deferred. It is all twilight; rue, only, blossoms in the lattice, the

plant they used to give to captives at the bar; in the bowl of water a purple butterfly lies drowned; in that landscape beyond there are evening shadows, but no evening stars. The whole picture has history.'

Beltran laughed.

'You have the swiftest and dreamiest of fancies! The grays and the pearls would please *me* just as well if their subject were any old Ogham stone, or a *gris de Flandres* jug. —Ned, what do you say?'

The Earl sauntered up with his eyeglass.

'By Jove, where'd you pick up that? I offered any money for the thing twelve months ago, and couldn't buy it.'

Dudley Moore just then, with the Capo di Monte for a theme, had commenced one of those charming disquisitions on Art with which he would occasionally favour people; learned, ironic, sometimes abstruse, always full of suggestion, to which painter and virtuoso were alike glad to listen.

The opinions he gave forth in them were seldom, indeed, similar to what flowed from his pen for the *Midas:* he was one of those—they are many—who deem the Public a child to whom it is not well to tell over-much truth. In the *Midas* he would uphold that a recent National-Gallery purchase was a quite undoubted Correggio, when in private he would rend the Correggio to atoms as the most miserable of impostors.

'Tom Glaze, who is my particular friend, bought it; Lord Esprit, whom I always make it a point to disagree with, attacked it; and the nation itself could not tell a Raphael from a Frank Stone,' he would say with a grim chuckle to his intimates. 'Besides, it is infinitely amusing to hear Esprit raging like a wounded boar in the House of Lords, and to see the public on its knees before that wretched bit of canvas, begotten yesterday by some lad on the Pincian hill, who couldn't pay his padrona's bill. I would not disturb so admirable a farce for the world.'

And so he would calmly continue to laud the Correggio in print, and to chuckle in private, and would atone to the public by flaying alive before it every hapless living artist he could find.

'Modern painters do not owe you much, sir,' said a youngster to him once, writhing under the *Midas*' ruthless flagellation of his first Academy picture.

'On the contrary,' said the great censor, taking his snuff; 'they owe me much, or might have owed me much. If they had only listened to me, they would have saved every shilling that they have thrown away on canvas!'

Whilst they were busied in discussion with him, I stole up to the little picture which Beltran had placed upon a low easel. There, with the soft warmth of the hothouse roses about it, I saw in its grayness, and sadness, and loneliness, the sketch of the Woman at the Lattice.

To that easel, when the great critic had left, Marmion Eagle came, and paused long before it.

'You have bought this?' he asked.

'I found it in a bric-à-brac shop the other day in Paris,' answered Beltran. 'Do you know the artist? Is it of value?'

Marmion Eagle did not answer; he was lost in thought before the little painting.

'Twelve months ago he refused its weight in gold,' he muttered after a while.

'Who did?'

'The painter of it.'

'And why did he refuse gold then,' asked Gladys, 'and yet now lets it lie for sale in a public place?'

'Because he is no longer in love with the woman who sat for it, I imagine,' said Beltran with his slight tired laugh. 'The Madonna that we consider priceless at midsummer has a knack of turning, by Christmas, into a mere venal model, who may go for whatever her charms chance to fetch!'

'Because he is no longer living,' said Marmion Eagle gravely. 'To few men is it given to be able to secure fame for their work when their hand has no longer its cunning, and their brain no longer its skill.'

'There is a story, then. Come, tell it us!'

'It is a very common story,' answered the painter with a smile that had a little bitterness. 'It was only that a man had some genius, and that a woman killed it.'

Gladys, where she sat amidst the fragrance of the frail hothouse roses, turned her head towards them.

'The picture told us something; but do you tell us more. It was not *that* woman who killed him?'

'This woman? No; I do not know very much; what I do know, I will tell.'

He sank into a chair near her, his hand playing with the delicate bloom of the roses, the faint afternoon light falling upon the little portrait that had been painted in the drowsy golden days of summer, at the Silver Stag, with the bees booming amongst the lime-blossoms, and the seeding grasses blowing in the wind.

'A year or more ago, Paris was mad about one young painter. Paris had seen his pictures for ten years, and refused to believe; then suddenly it took a fit of belief, and could not atone enough. It is the public way. Only, unhappily, the public is so often like a child, and leaves its neglected bird so long to starve in an empty cage, that when it comes to caress the bird, it finds but a ruffled heap of dead plumage, which cannot feel its kisses. This young man was kissed before he was dead; he had the good fortune to conceive a picture which drew the whole city to it. You will remember it—it was called Faustine.'

'Faustine!' echoed Beltran, to whom he had turned. 'Of course, a marvellous painting.'

'Well, the painter of Faustine painted also yonder sketch of the Woman at the Lattice. I wonder that you should have overlooked that sketch when it was shown in the Salon. He was offered any money for it, but he refused to sell it. "Shall a man sell his soul?" he used to say; but I believe no one knew what he meant. I was in Paris a great deal last year, and I saw but never spoke to him. He was the handsomest man I ever beheld. Handsome is no word for him; he was as beautiful as a god. When he walked in the Bois, people turned after him as though he were a king or a woman; he was like some Phydian statue incarnated. Unhappily, in an evil hour Cléopâtre saw his beauty.'

'I remember now,' murmured Beltran.

'Who was Cléopâtre?' asked Gladys.

'Cléopâtre? Well, she was Cléopâtre. Paris knew little more, neither need you. But it is told of her that when she saw the scathing satire of the Faustine, she said, "He has dared to scourge us; very well, then, we will scourge him." I do not know whether this is true, or whether it was invented afterwards as an *apropos*. If people do not say a suitable thing, Paris always takes care that one is invented for them.

'It matters little what she said, or whether she was moved by devilish vengeance or by devilish love. She set herself to gain possession of him—of his heart, of his passion, of his genius, of his life. She has a matchless beauty herself. She succeeded. The leaves were just budding when she saw him first, at sunset, by the lake in the Bois; by the time that the trees were in full foliage, he had no god but his passion, no heaven but her face.

'She made him paint her portrait in the first burning days of the summer; and when all Paris flocked to the Cléopâtre, the Faustine was avenged. The satirist had fallen, and kissed the feet of the courtesan. Well, just so long as the portrait took to paint, just so long had he his fool's paradise. When it was finished, and in it all Paris glorified her afresh, then she turned and laughed him to scorn, and took in his stead a gipsy-eyed prince, who came from the woods and the plains where royalty still is half savage, and the European is half Oriental.

'We know how men of the world take these things; but this painter knew the world so little. He was young, ignorant, maddened; and he loved a woman to whom love was a jest, a scoff, a byword of theft. It is very terrible when a man really *loves* a woman that is vile: it is terrible, but it happens.

'When he was jeered at, forbidden her presence, finally thrust aside by her lacqueys, whilst she drove from her gates with the gipsy-eyed prince by her side, and the jewels of the prince on her bosom, then this man whom she had deserted grew mad. Forgive him—he knew so little of the world, and he loved a creature without mind or soul—a splendid animal, made but to prey. I think the world does not hold a greater curse for a man than that.

'He was mad; and he followed them on foot, turning once only aside, and that once into a place where he had used to paint, and where his colours, and draperies, and old armouries were still kept. They drove with swift horses, and he turned aside this once; yet hardly had they entered the Bois before he entered it also. I saw this, because I myself drove scarcely a yard behind them.

'It was at the close of a late summer day, I had gone there, and hundreds were there also, though the city was thinning. The sun was setting. Everything was reddened

by the flush. The very waters seemed dyed crimson. Everywhere there was a hot hungry glare. I even heard the hoot of a mosquito—it did not seem to be Paris.

'Through the clouds of dust and the throngs of people he came, as swift as a hound runs; his head was bare, his hair was streaming back, his face, commonly so fair, was dark with a rush of blood; his eyes—I see them sometimes at night still. All his wonderful, god-like beauty seemed gone; he looked like some goaded wild beast—goaded to fury, and dying.

'He passed me like the lightning; there was a rush to stop him; but he tore through the crowd, breaking loose of all opposing hands, and darting like a meteor through the light. There was a flash—a shriek—a sudden oscillation of all the gay, laughing, pleasure-seeking mob. Through the dust I saw a straight steel dagger-blade glitter in the air; then the wind whirled, the dust rose again: I saw no more. But the voices that cried out around told me that in that moment of time he had stabbed both himself and his rival. With the prince the blow had missed of its aim, merely grazing the flesh as it passed; but he himself lay bathed in blood, in the dust, under the trampling hoofs of her horses.

'She supped that night in the Bois, in the café by the cascade; and she laughed, and she drank, and she talked of her diamonds, as she ate the sweetmeats a duke had provided. On the whole, no doubt, she was glad: the tragedy sent her name but more loudly down the stream of the world's babbling voices.

'For him—they took him to the horrors of the Bicêtre. He was not quite dead; when men loathe life they are hard to kill. Life lingered in him for five weeks—five weeks of raving fever, of intolerable torture. One burning, stormy night, a night with fire in the skies, and death in the air, his agony was ended. He died in unutterable torment, delirious to the last, gnashing his teeth like a mad dog at all who strove to draw near or aid him; and like a mad dog, dead, they buried him.'

There was a long silence as his voice sank away. When one hearer raised her head, her eyes were heavy with tears.

'And *she?*' she murmured, glancing at the portrait of the woman at the lattice.

'Ah, I know nothing of her, not even who she was,' he made answer. 'I know no more than I have told. But this was the end of his genius; and already—Paris has forgotten that ever he lived; and your friend has bought that picture for a song in a bric-à-brac den yesterday.'

CHAPTER XXXV

TOY-SOLDIERS.

It is needless to say that I had quickly asked Fanfreluche of what had chanced to Nellie, the Wood-Elf; she had treated the inquiry with some scorn, as touching a little, half-obscure burlesque player, beneath the attention of *nous autres.*

'My dear,' she made answer to my renewed inquiries, 'girls like that little Courcey always remain just where they were. They are the rank and file of the theatrical army; they get little loot and still less promotion. They go on the stage, when they are in the freshness of their youth, because they have pretty little faces, trim limbs, and a fancy for jumping about in gay dresses, instead of sweeping, or baking, or washing, or trudging through life as a shop-woman, or as a mill-hand, or as a maid-of-all-work. They have very small talent, they have no education at all; they dislike work, and they like gaudy attire. The modern stage wants hundreds of such; and to it they go. They are all just so much tinder lying all ready for the devil's flint—we *say* the devil still, you know, because he is such a convenient synonym for all our vanities and wickednesses, though he went out long ago with the coming in of light wines, long beards, cigars, clubs, croquet, chignons, railways, five-twenties, and other conveniences. The life these girls lead is about as hard as most domestic servants', and they haven't their "washing and board found;" but they like it because they can dress as they choose, and have a chance of bad champagnes and casino flirtations. They're not all immoral, poor children; some few are good enough girls, who keep their families out of their wages. But they are all of the same class; the class that naturally likes noisy fun, and tawdry glitter and a sight of what they, God help them

call "Life," better than they do industry, and quietude, and the drear sameness of an English workwoman's existence. And now and then, out of their rank, a Lilian Lee or a Laura Pearl rises; and the poor little fools believe that the exception of one in ten thousand is the sure and invariable rule for all. The life is not, maybe, so odious when they are young and pretty; but it can contain no asylum for them as they grow in years and lose in beauty: and then—then one wonders vaguely what on earth can become of them, for they are seen no more, just as idly as one may wonder what becomes of all the lost pins.'

'The pins, they do say,' I returned, 'are always found in the bottoms of sewers in a hard, shapeless mass that they call, I think, "slag." I am afraid that these girls whom you talk of are found at the bottom of the social strata, hardened into evil, or, at the best, into wretchedness.'

'Most likely,' returned Fanfreluche, with asperity; she never liked anyone to say a neat thing save herself. 'The stage certainly has nothing to say to them. The stage may want armies of round-faced girls to skip about as mazurka-maidens, or as elves, or as shepherdesses, or as soldiers, but it never wants armies of middle-aged women. I suppose they do go to wretchedness of some sort—they must. But, then, so, I'm afraid, do whole multitudes of governesses, and housemaids, and shopwomen, and cottagers, who never did a naughty thing in all their days, and yet are left to starve on half-a-crown "relief," or drag out their decaying years in workhouses. There are so far too many women! —if two-thirds of all the female children that are born were put in the water-butt, where they put two-thirds of our puppies, the world might be comfortable.'

'If women had more spheres—' I commenced, but she cut my words in two.

'Where did you learn that miserable cant? There are more men then there is work for already: do you suppose you would increase the harmony of the earth by setting women to squabble with them for it as two of our mongrels may quarrel over a bone?'

'But if they were educated?'

'Ah, my dear,' said Fanfreluche with a grin, 'we are going to educate everybody, they say, so that everybody shall be above doing anything. What a millennium that will be!'

'But where is Nellie?' I persisted.

'She is just now, I believe, at the Palace Theatre, in the Strand; a pretty theatre, as you may know, though not to be called fashionable, and the chief home of burlesque and ballet, now that *we* have gone in for Legitimate Art—whatever that may mean: of course, every playwright thinks his own bantlings "legitimate," and other people's plays all bastards!'

'She is doing the same as ever then?'

'Yes. They always stick to the same, till they are shelved altogether. You know she is a spirited little dancer, and has a certain small bright talent of her own, but she will never be anything except Prince Goldenhair or King Charming in a burlesque. She might have all the genius and poetry of a Ristori, nobody would ever see in her anything except a "jolly little girl" in a slashed tunic and white-satin tights, singing doggrel to a catching air. If you begin with being a job-horse, though you should win the Derby itself, nobody would ever believe that you could have either pace or race in you. Nellie has always done burlesque, and she will have to do burlesque till the end of time. There are such scores of such girls!—well, I suppose it is a good thing; if everybody would only play Lady Macbeth, where would the theatres be?'

'But the stage is such hard life anyhow! and without eminence in it—'

'It is worse than making lace at a profit of a farthing an hour, or sewing fifteen hours for fourpence-halfpenny, or carding cotton in the mills at four-and-sixpence a week, or, for a few pence a ton, panning salt in the scorching steam, till their pallid faces are like a sodden sponge?—Well, yes, I think it may be even worse. *We* know that. But how should the girls know it when they are ignorant, and conscious of good looks, and wanting a bit of finery and a fling of dancing? and the floats and the green-room seem almost to them like paradise. The lives of women of the English poor are so abject, so colourless, so dreary, without any break of joy, or any pause of toil, or any gleam of hope, and full of such noise, and stench, and cursing riot, and bloodless apathy, all commingled, that one cannot wonder if they would sometimes exchange such lives even for hell itself!'

And I knew that she said truly; for indeed to live only to know the pains, the needs, the agonies, and the travails that lie in living, is a hard fate, though it be the fate of millions.

'And where they might be happy and innocent they will not,' I answered, for my thoughts went back to the little cottage beneath the rosethorn, and to the honest smith's forge amidst the woods, where the woman who had chosen vice and pillage, might have dwelt in honoured virtue and in homely peace.

Fanfreluche grinned.

'No, my dear—not often—and I suppose it's a very fortunate thing that they don't. If they would, we might perhaps get our salt panned, and our cotton carded, but we certainly shouldn't get our material for scenic effects of fine legs, and of gauzy tunics! I often think when I hear them talking, as it's the way to talk now, of bringing everybody to be so very virtuous, and so very refined, and so very intellectual, and so very divine, where on earth, if they were ever to succeed, would the world go for the human *chiffons* out of whose bodies and souls it manufactures all its amusements? So long as amusement must be had, I am sure they cannot afford to ask their common men and women to be virtuous. The *residuum* that they sigh over is what yields them gaieties, as the foul-smelling ditch-mud yields the pretty painted myosotis. A thousand nightingales died to make the Roman epicure's pâté; tens of thousands of human beings perish in moral death to give to one city—its pleasures.'

And this was all that, for a time, I heard of Nellie.

She was playing at the pretty little Palace Theatre, which was of some repute at that moment for burlesques; and now and then I heard two or three men say how awfully jolly little Courcey was in that funny parody of the Bride of Lammermoor, or how tremendously well got up she had been, in crimson, and white, and gold, as the King of the Golden River, in the pantomime that had been based upon that story, at the Palace, at Christmas. She was leading the old life, no doubt, learning doggrel, singing rubbish, dancing hornpipes and jigs, delighting the gallery with appropriate 'gag,' quarrelling in the green-room, supping noisily over kidneys and 'fizz,' trudging home afoot in the

gray break of the dawn, or jolting wearily over the stones in an omnibus, with its glandered dying horses; her appointed portion hard work and coarse pleasure.

No other life was possible to her, once having enlisted herself in this.

She was one of the 'rank and file;' one of those innumerables who, *tambour battant*, serve to make up a spectacle. The conscription of Fate had drawn her to be one of the toy-soldiers of King Joujou, who has a terrible knack of killing his soldiers himself sometimes. So long as she could wear her little gilded uniform jauntily and well King Joujou paid her wage, and she held a place on his great parade-ground of public amusement; if she were ever to faint or to fall it would not matter—there were plenty as pretty and as alert as she to catch her little pennant as it dropped, and fill her place in that great army wherewith King Joujou plays the mimic war of pleasure.

She was no genius, she was no beauty, she was only a little blue-eyed, sturdy-limbed girl of the populace, with the *beauté du diable* in her cheeks, and her curls, and the freshness of youth in her voice that gave something of charm and of melody even to those vile slang inanities that she was appointed to sing. There were scores like her: what happened to her mattered to no one. She came to a workhouse at her birth: she would go to a workhouse for her grave. To the world this seemed exceedingly fitting; an arrangement proper, and quite harmonious.

And meanwhile—was it not much that a young creature, born of a pauper, and reared by the parish, should know the feel of silks and satins if only in her stage dresses, and should know the taste of champagnes if only made of gooseberries? On the whole, when you consider that a pauper child is an animal absolutely undesired by any one; very much lower than a pig, which can at least be sold so much per stone; and possessing nothing on the face of the earth except its hunger and its heartaches; it may be conceded that Nellie had done very well for herself when she had got leave to dance about in bright colours for some half-dozen years, and then could go leisurely to either death or perdition quite at her own choice and fancy. Several millions, you know, have to die in rags, and infancy—whether they may like it or not.

One day I got out 'on the loose,' as your slang phrases it; a reprehensible practice, no doubt, but one dear to dogs as to men, for better is a bare bone in the gutter, with the sweetness of free-will, than are fatted meats eaten within the curb and the gall of a chain.

My little wanderings were innocent enough in those streets and gardens of artistic South Kensington which stretched around the pretty villa where we dwelt. I was about to return of my own accord homeward, when I saw a girl walking down one of the small and narrow lanes that do so curiously intersect even your proudest lines of palaces.

There was something in the lithe step, the clusters of auburn hair, and the supple yet sturdy figure that I knew; I felt sure that they were Nellie's, and, quick as thought, I darted after her. I could not reach her to attract her notice before she turned in at the doorway of one of the small, poor houses of the place, but I was near enough to follow her in unseen, and mount the stairs up which she had disappeared.

There were three flights of these; and on the landing of the third a door stood a trifle open: my instinct told me that she had passed through it, and I squeezed myself through its inch-wide opening, and entered the chamber.

It was a poor, meagre, little room; very dull, very mean; looking upon leaden tiles and red chimneys, and grey gusts of sulphurous smoke. There were the mansions of the nobles and of the traders, the villas of the fashionable actresses, the artistic homes of the successful painters, all around in the sweet, cool, living sunshine, with the greenness of budding trees about them, and the colours of art and luxury within them. But this little room, with no look-out save on those endless roofs and those drear columns of smoke, was almost as cheerless and as wretched as though it had been in the haunts of Whitechapel; whilst through its one narrow window there only came upon the wind the scent of frying meats, the stench of decaying vegetables, the screams of children, and the throbbing of a steam-hammer at its never-ending work.

There was a little linen-curtained bed standing in one corner; and on it was stretched a girl, dying it was easy to see, of fever. She was very young, and though her face was now so drawn and scarlet, it also was easy to see that

but a very little time before it must have been a pretty brown, baby face, with a little cherry-like mouth, and robin-like eyes; such a face as would have been the pride of 'mother' and of 'teacher' in some cottage home and village choir.

She also, doubtless, had been one of the toy-troopers of King Joujou. He sweeps into his conscription all whom he can find from far and wide, over all his kingdom; from the shepherd's hut on the moorlands, as from the crowded lanes and gullies of the city; from the little, humble, ivy-hidden village on the hills, as from the vast wards of the poor-house and the factory. And those he once has gained can never leave his service; until he breaks them in his gay caprice, or leaves them perishing by the wayside.

She was lying quite still and straight; with her brown eyes wide open, burning, and without sense in them; her cloud of dusky curls had been shorn short; her lips were parted with quick, painful, gasping breaths. She was muttering vague, broken words about father, and harvest, and going gleaning, and going blackberrying; her thoughts, no doubt, with some peasant life that she had led in childhood in the green level lands of the corn countries, or under the shelter of the oak woods of the west.

The other girl, auburn-haired and blue-eyed, who I saw was indeed the little 'Wood-Elf,' had dropped beside the couch, and was murmuring gentle words to her, and hushing her tenderly, and holding to her some fresh, cool, orange-scented drink.

The fever-stricken child drank eagerly; but she had no knowledge or consciousness in her regard, and when she had drained the draught she lay still and straight again, muttering huskily of the blackberries that were ripe in the lower wood, and that they would be late for school if they stayed to gather them.

On such a scene I did not dare to break; and yet I had not the heart to leave; so I crouched down in the shadow behind the door, and waited.

An aged woman came slowly in; a gaunt, shrivelled, cruel-eyed hag.

'It arn't no good fussing about her,' the old woman muttered in a low voice. 'The doctor say as how she can't live another day. And you're well-nigh wored out.'

Nellie shook her head silently.

'This day do begin a new week,' muttered the old creature hoarsely. 'I thought as how she'd have gone off quiet by now. Do you stand another week's rent—eh? She han't got a shilling, you know.'

Nellie, in silence still, opened a little purse, and counted into the woman's wrinkled palm sixteen shillings. It was a shabby, little, mean chamber; but rent, like all other things, is so dear—to the poor.

'You won't ever sit up this night again?' pursued the old dame, doubtless softened by the thrice blessed music of silver pieces. 'You've sat up nine nights already. You'll kill yourself—and with all your work at the theayter, too, as well.'

'I sha'n't be harmed,' said Nellie briefly, and turned herself away, and again sat down beside the bed. And there she remained for more than two hours, whilst without, in the soft, bright, cool spring afternoon the tender leaf-buds quivered in the sunlight; and the carriages swept in hundreds through the streets; and the fashionable crowds flocked to saunter through the palm-houses, and to listen to music, and to laugh, and to flirt, and to make their pleasant appointments, and to draw their magnificent dresses slowly over the lawns, at the first azalea show of the year.

It is the sharpness of its contrasts that lends all its poetry, its vigour, its ambition, and its colour to your life; but sometimes—they are bitter.

Nellie sat motionless beside the bed, with the light from the casement coming in upon her; in it I saw that she was much altered.

The round cheeks, the smooth forehead, the ruddy mouth, had all hardened, and got a curious, worn, coarse, pained look. The soft skin and the bright colours of a woman cannot stand long the rouge, and the white paint, and the steaming gas, and the late hours of the theatrical life of a burlesque-dancer. They will 'make-up' just as well as ever by night; but by day—they make your heart ache, as does a fresh rose lying soiled and stamped in the mud of the streets.

And yet, despite this rack and wear of time, there was a sweeter look in her eyes than of yore, a sadder, steadier, and purer look, as of one who had suffered, and not vainly.

When the dying girl in the little white bed tossed and

moaned, Nellie touched her gently, moved her carefully, and murmured to her a few soothing words, which, though they could not reach the dulled and wandering brain, seemed yet to bear with them some balm and hush. She was a little wicked thing, of course; accursed of all good souls; gaining her livelihood by ministering to the base senses of coarse sight-seers; purchasing her daily bread by moral degradation, and in a sensual spectacle; and yet she came hither to soothe the last dread hours of a creature poorer and lonelier even than herself; and when her heart throbbed, and her eyes smarted, and her limbs ached, after the work and the noise of her theatrical labour, she had sat, night after night, sleepless, worn-out, weary unutterably, only just for the mere sake that a fever-stricken girl should feel a friend's hand near when it sought one on its death-struggle.

Another hour went by: there was no change in the suffering she watched.

Sometimes the girl lay quite quiet, sunk in apathy, breathing hardly; at others she tossed, and moaned, and cried out in pitiful ways of all the remembered things of some lost country home—of pastured cattle; of running waters; of the hymn that should be learned for Sunday; of the bilberries that were ripening in the old birchwood on the moor; of the verses that mother had given her to learn by rote in punishment for saying that she wished she were a lady.

In all the sorrowful, wistful, shattered words, it was so plain to see the story that went with that little brown winsome face; the story of the rebellious petulance, and fretful impatience, and vague discontent, which had brought the cotter's prettiest sunniest child from moor and meadow, from burn and byre, from the old safe ways, and the old healthful labour, and the old summer gladness by hill and dale, and the old fireside nook by 'mother's' side, to perish here of fever, and alone, amidst the noise, and smoke, and stench, and misery that are the birth-chime and the death-knell of the poor in cities.

'She had wished to be a lady,'—and she died here.

Poor little pretty sunburnt face, once bright as a brown brook, and ruddy as a berry of the yew!

Doubtless in that little cottage, wheresoever it stood, far away amidst gray hills, and soft mists, and sunny birchen woods, and calm green pastures, there was one name that

was never spoken; one chair that was never drawn to the noonday meal: one voice, like the robin's, that the father missed from the girls' choir at the church; one kiss, given in smiles and tears, that the mother felt only in her dreams, when sleep came to her beneath the old thatched roof.

Yet another hour passed; the slow dull chimes of some distant clock swung six strokes through the air. Nellie started, rose, looked wistfully at the little bed, then stooped, and touched with her lips the child's flushed, knitted, aching brow. The girl moved wearily under the touch; her dark eyes still wide open, still without light or sense in them.

'Mother—mother,' she murmured, 'don't be angry. I did not mean to stay away from school. It was me, not Susie, did it. The wood was so pleasant this mornin', and the birds was singing so sweet, and the vi'lets was so many, I forgot—I quite forgot!'

And in answer there only came the dull fall of the steam-hammer, the dull breath of the poisoned wind.

Nellie turned slowly away, and passed from the chamber, and down the steep flights of the stairs. Far below she met the old woman to whom she had given the money.

'Do look at her; pray do look at her!' she entreated. 'I will come the moment the play is over.'

The old woman muttered assent.

'But where's the good on't?' she asked; ''tis waste of time. The girl's a dead un, a dead un.'

Nellie went in silence out into the street. I followed her, and fawned on her.

She looked down, and started violently, as though she recognised me; with a quick glance at the name upon my collar, she raised me in her arms. Then, silently still, she went as rapidly as she could through the various ways that led to the gardens of Gladys' residence. Before the walls a groom was riding his own horse, and leading up and down a beautiful black mare, in which I recognised a favourite of Beltran's, by name Eblis.

As we drew near the gate it opened, and Beltran himself came out from it.

I felt her heart beat thickly against mine. She trembled, and would have fled; but he had seen and already approached her in the quiet road, under the shadow of the trees overtopping the wall. He thanked her for seeing to my safety.

'Not for the first time, either,' he added. 'It is the same dog you used to know. You are coming in here, are you not?'

Her voice shook as she answered him, 'No.'

'And why not?' he asked. 'Gladys so continually regrets the way you shun her; you are always absent when she tries to see you, and you will never come here, or accept anything at our hands. Why do you do it, Nellie?'

'It's best, my lord,' she said curtly.

'I am at a loss why you say so. She feels herself driven into a sort of ingratitude that is most abhorrent to her. Indeed, you give her great pain.'

Nellie said nothing.

'Come in now,' he urged. She is alone! she will be rejoiced to see you.'

'No, thank you; no, sir,' she answered him. 'Please let me go!'

'This is sheer obstinacy, Nellie. You rendered her too great a debt for her ever to forget, or wish to forget, it. You should not make her look, or feel, so negligent of it.'

'She's neither, my lord. But—but—I'm not fit for the likes of her. There's harm enough said of her without me adding to it.'

His face flushed a little: it was he, now, who made no answer.

'Tell her—tell her,' murmured Nellie, 'that it's because I love her that I won't come anigh her; and tell her, sir, that I know her sweet, generous, tender nature a deal too well as ever to think she'd forget me—quite. Let me go—please let me go.'

'Why, Nellie, what is the matter? You are crying.'

'Am I, sir? It's only—I've just come from little Annie Dell as is a-dying—she's a dancer, like me; they calls her on the playbills Clarice Vaughan. It's fever; and she's only been a year on the boards; and she's a little soft thing like a kitten—it seems sad.'

'Fever! Can I do nothing? There are many things she must want. Do let me help you—'

'She'll want nought no more, sir, when this night's over-passed,' said Nellie very softly. 'But you're very good—very. You've had a deal of goodness, my lord, again and again, to poor girls as was in want or woe; and all you've ever got back for it is a bad name.'

Then she turned and rushed swiftly down the street, as though ashamed of her temerity, or fearful of his questions.

Beltran stood still and looked after her.

'A bad name! A bad name!' he muttered. 'What does it matter for me? But for this glorious creature—when my lips have never even touched hers!'

Then he flung himself into saddle and rode away with Eblis.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

APRIL FLOWERS.

'THERE was rather a good thing happened last night,' said Fanfreluche to me a few evenings later in the supper-room of the Coronet, where Gladys had been playing in that favourite part of hers, the Beatrice, in which she had first challenged and won the suffrages of the London public.

Fanfreluche was accustomed to spend her nights out at pleasure; her present owner never heeded what she did nor where she went; she had established herself in his chambers unasked and undesired; and she had liberty to do just as she pleased—to go to perdition if she preferred.

Sometimes I think that this is one of the most exquisite enjoyments man or dog can have; no doubt we ought to be very grateful to those who will drag us to our good with collar and chain, but the process is apt to get excessively irksome to us; and I doubt very much if the poor suicides amongst you, who are hoisted out half-drowned from the mud of the Thames or the stench of the Seine, when they see all their trouble gone through for nothing, feel very grateful to the grappling-irons and the hot bricks that call them back nilly-willy to the woe and weariness of life.

'There was rather a good thing last night,' she pursued. 'We dined at Richmond; only men; a dinner that Claud Lucy gave to some members of the Circle des Patineurs.

'The men were all right, except one, and he was an underbred one—Abney Arcott. I don't think you know him. He's only been heard of the last year. He made a big fortune in agencies and things abroad! and by money and luck, and flunkeyism, and a gorgeous place in the

Forest, with a first-rate cook in it, he has got pushed amongst some of our *beaux messieurs dorés*. Only we don't take him amongst our own women; and always blackball him carefully all the way down St. James's-street, from the Bow-window to the Thatched-house; and only treat his Forest place like a very good inn, where the host don't present you a bill. Lucan Phipps brought him out; and Lucan generally trains pretty decently. Even he can't polish this fellow, quite; but as Arcott always seems to get awed when he's amongst his betters, he has never made a real blunder before. Florance Fane used to give him awful facers last season; and it always seemed to put him into tolerably fair form.

'I remember when they went first to dine at his place,—Flo and seven other men of the Brigades,—old Flo, as they went into the dining-room, stared hard through his eye-glass at the dinner-table, and at the ninth place at the top, to which Abney Arcott was moving.

'"I think you mistook us—quite," said Flo, in his quietest and most amiable tones; "we said we'd dine *here;* we never said we'd dine with *you!*"

'Well—last night Arcott was more loquacious than common. Somebody said he was *tête monté*, because the Duchess of Astolat had actually sent him a card: somebody else said it was because he was out without his trainer; Lucan being over in Paris. Whichever it was, he let his tongue run far more than usual. On his off side sat Lord Cississiter—you may know the man; stout, florid, with a ruddy beard, and a shady name on the turf; looks a bully, and is one when he "feels a winner!" Beltran, whom he happens to hate, because our friend thrashed him at Eton some twenty-five years ago, and has been down upon him on every possible occasion ever since, sat on the other side of the table, some way nearer to Lucy.

'Around Cississiter they got talking of theatres and such-like; and of all themes in this world Arcott must needs harp upon Gladys Gerant. He talked a great deal of her; and all more or less in an offensive fashion.

'Beltran did not miss a syllable; but he went on with his dinner and his own conversation as if he heard nothing. Presently the millionaire grew coarser, and said one or two things the meaning of which there can be no mistaking,

and which can only be said of women of the lightest name and lowest life; and he ended with a sneer at her continual absence from places and pastimes that "her sort" were only too glad to be invited to enjoy.

'"Quite right, Mr. Arcott, quite right!" called out Cississiter in his loudest tones. "It's the damnedest affectation. She's as wild as any of 'em. But she's chosen to run dark in that form, you know—they often do when they're young uns. It's the commonest stable trick."

'Then, and only then, Beltran looked up, and without his face changing a muscle, glanced across the table, and "fixed" both the men with eyes that can be very hard and cruel when he chooses.

'"I'm glad *you*'ve come within range, Cississiter," he said very slowly and distinctly. "One can't spoil powder on vermin. I suppose you don't in the least know what you're talking about. I do. The lady you speak of is quite as good as your mother; and a very great deal better than your wife."

'Can't you fancy the dead silence that fell over the gay and boisterous talk?

'It was straight hard hitting, a little more in the rough and ready style, and less subtle than his reprisals usually are; but he knew his foes, and it was the most effective he could possibly have used with them. It fell with the force of a sledge-hammer. Lady Cississiter is the wildest and worst of her order.

'What happened after? Nothing ever happens after in these days. There was a tumultuous, tempestuous scene for a few moments; but Beltran calmly ignored the wrangle, and only addressed himself to his host.

'"I'll bid you good-night, Lucy," said he. "I don't want you to be bored with a row. Your friends know where to find me—if they want."

'But the sympathies of the table were with him; the common feeling was that he had been only *dans son droit*. Of course they all believed that he had lied; but it was the sort of lie that gentlemen like from a gentleman's mouth, and which becomes him well always.

'The upshot of it was that he did not leave the dinner, but Cississiter and Arcott did. That is Beltran's way of dealing with people who rouse him. But whether he cares

for the woman he defended is quite another matter—he would take the part of an ugly old apple-seller if he were in the mood, and thought the odds strong against her.'

As she concluded her narrative Beltran and Denzil sauntered in; they had just come into the house, it appeared, from a dinner with her Grace of Astolat.

They were speaking of this very occurrence of the previous night.

'It was hitting with the gloves off, Vere,' said Denzil, as he cast himself into a chair. 'It wasn't quite so polished as your usual style.'

'I never put the gloves on with men like those,' said Beltran, going up to the mantelpiece to light a cigar. Pummel them as you may they don't feel, that's the worst of it.'

'I should think they do feel—rather—with the story running wild this morning about the clubs and drawing-rooms.'

'I'm afraid Bully Cississiter don't. Do you remember my thrashing him at Eton for stealing little Holyrood's champagnes?'

'He felt that—he was black and blue for a month. Have you heard anything from him?'

'Not a word.'

'I don't suppose you will. It would be too ridiculous for him to meet you on the sands by Ostend about his wife, —of all people in the world.'

Beltran laughed.

'O, I don't know. As long as your wife *is* your wife, I suppose she's *casus belli* enough for everything.'

'All the men were with you; feeling ran very strong about it—'

'What's the good? Do you suppose any one of them thinks one whit better of the child?'

'I don't know that they do—'

'You know that they don't!'

'I fear that they don't, certainly. That is one of the peculiar successes of modern society—that there is no means whereby a man can declare the innocence and honour of a woman that shall not at once stigmatise her with darker slanders than ever touched her before.'

'Yes. Now and then, though we know that, we are

weak enough to let a cur get a rise out of us; but we are safe to repent it,—or ought to do for the woman's sake.'

Then he began to talk of other matters, hearing a step that he knew without, and a moment later there entered the only person in all the town who had heard nothing of the scene at Claud Lucy's dinner.

Of course she had not heard it; would never hear of it; you never do hear of any one of the million ways in which your world ruins, ridicules, marries, divorces, attaints, decides for you, prophesies of you, and even murders you —in your absence.

I asked Fanfreluche that night if Denzil had altogether forgotten his lost love; whereat she grinned.

'I don't know, my dear. Men do forget in seven days sometimes, and sometimes they don't in seven years. It just depends. They remind me of Clyde Paulett, when they were woodcock-shooting in the west of Ireland last year. They had very fine sport all the week, but Paulett was not in his usual spirits. No bags that he made seemed to give him much pleasure; and though, when they totted up the whole, he was found to have shot more than any other, he appeared to care little. They asked him what on earth was the matter with him—was it women or Jews, a plant on the turf, or a bad vein at *écarté?* "Well," he said slowly and sadly, "to tell you the truth, I can't forget that one grand old cock that I blazed away at, like a duffer, and didn't bowl over. I *have* felt such a fool!" Now, you know, I think it's very much with their loves as it is with their sport. However many head of game may lie slain at their feet, they can't forget what they "*blaze at and don't bowl over.*"'

A brief while later, in the balmy spring weather, we had a little river-party—surely the pleasantest of all sunlit pastimes. Because Gladys was in a manner excluded from most pleasures by her rejection of one world, and by the other world's rejection of her, her friend did all in his power that she should feel her loss as little as possible. Happily for her, she was of a temper to which the meditative and intellectual pleasures of thought and art were far more suited than the noisier and more frivolous diversions of society.

But yet there were in her the natural impulses of youth

towards gladness and gaiety, which, although bruised by the sorrows of her brief life, had not been wholly broken. And these he always sought to meet and to indulge, as far as it was possible to do so without exposing her to that companionship from which he had always warded her.

The boating-party usually consisted of two four-oars, of which the crews were chosen from his own chief friends. They used to take to the river some half-dozen miles out of town; scull leisurely down to some pretty wooded resting-place, to which servants had been sent earlier with choice meats and light wines; lunch there; laugh and smoke; paddle a little about amongst the tall reeds and the floating forgot-me-nots; and so row back to London in time for twilight and for dinner. There were few pleasanter days, of simpler or more careless open-air amusement, than these river-days of Beltran's; and it was held as an eagerly-coveted distinction to be one of those invited by him to take a place in his boats. It was well known that, though a man not commonly scrupulous in such matters, he was excessively scrupulous as to whom he introduced to association with Gladys.

Men held their own opinions, doubtless, as to his relations with her; but they saw that he chose to treat her with perfect deference, and they had to follow his lead. Two or three of them even, I think, credited the truth, and believed in her innocence almost as thoroughly as he did who knew it.

You, indeed, are very curious in this. In your clubs and your camps, in your mischievous moods and your philosophic moods, always indeed theoretically, you consider all women immoral (except, just, of course, your own mothers); but practically, when your good feeling is awakened, or your honest faith honestly appealed to, you will believe in a woman's honour with a heartiness and strength for which she will look in vain in her own sex. According to your jests, the world is one vast harem, of which all the doors are open to every man, and whose fair inmates are all alike impressionable to the charm of intrigue or to the chink of gold. But, in simple earnest and reality, I have heard the wildest and most debonair amongst you—once convinced of the honour and innocence looking from a woman's eyes—stand up in defence of these when libelled in her absence, with a zeal and a stanchness that did my heart good.

The boats this day went Henley way, and the pause was above Wargrave.

The river was a sheet of dusky sunlight; the meadows and banks were all golden with kingcups and daffodils; the hawthorn-buds were blooming on the great coiled swinging branches; the leafage was in all its sweetest and freshest green, and here and there a little water-bird was darting amongst the tall bulrushes and the green river-plants.

Under the skilled sinewy hands of men who, in their time, had won their honours on the Isis, the boats went as the rowers would—now skimming as fast as a swallow, now loitering like a slow-winged eider duck—past the green, level, daisied fields, and the lofty walls of woodland, and the dark gateways of the locks, and the sunny reaches where the cattle stood, and the tufts of reeds and sedges that hid the soft blue of the forget-me-nots.

They landed, and lunched, and lingered over the fruit and the ice and the wine, under the blossoming hawthorns and the great boughs of the chestnuts; and then strolled hither and thither, pulling down the plume-like hawthorn for a standard for her boat, and gathering the primroses by thousands to fill her hands; carelessly enjoying such simple country things, and wandering, these men of the world, as though they were shepherds in a pastoral—save for the cigars that were for ever in their mouths, and for the worldly gossipry that they laughed over with one another.

With the freshness of the springtide, with the sunshine of the waters, with the cool odours of herbage and foliage, with the light easy laughter, and the gay friendly converse, how charming they were, those river hours! And for one, at least, amongst them, over the broad bright Thames, and over the fields of flower-sown grasses, there shone the 'light that never yet was upon land or sea,' save in the eyes of a woman, when she lives in the first full sweet faith, the dreaming idolatrous ideals, of a love half known, half answered, yet still in all the deep untroubled peace of its birth-slumbers.

When the sun was slanting to the west, the boats were sought for the return. Whilst they went for them, Gladys remained where she had sat some time, couched in the curving roots of a great beech, whilst at her feet the water flowed amongst the rushes, and the great green lily-leaves spread out their splendour, though flowerless as yet.

She had been very still awhile, and Denzil also, who remained with her, and not spoken.

She was often very grave, when the stillness of the country was around her. I fancy that her thoughts were with the years when the boy Harold had been a child beside her, in the old, cool, moss-grown paths of orchards and in the tangled ways of nut-tree coppices, binding the cowslips and the primroses and the daffodils with withes of ivy, and dreaming of the imperishable things he should achieve when manhood came.

After a while she raised her eyes from the water and looked at Denzil. He had thrown himself on his side on the grass; and his face, in the shade of the trees, was dark, stern, sad exceedingly.

'Where are your thoughts?' she asked him.

Beltran's best-beloved friend seemed to her almost as a brother.

Her voice found its way to the closed recesses of his memory, and he answered her simply and truly, 'Of a woman I loved.'

Her eyes rested on him with their serious, meditative sweetness.

'Tell me of her,' was all she said.

'I never speak of her.'

'Never? She is dead, then?'

'Not that I know; she is dead to me. That is enough, you see.'

'Who was she? What was she?'

'She was an actress, like you. You may hear them recall her now and then, when they speak, as they speak still sometimes of Gertrude D'Eyncourt.'

She raised herself on one arm; her eyes lighted and charged.

'Ah, I know! that beautiful woman whose portrait he has shown me—so heroic a face, so full of thought, of patience, of courage. But she was some one's wife, surely? She was married?'

'Ah, child! do not speak as if *you* had caught the world's cant. Yes, she was married to a beast, who only prized her proud beauty, and her bright graces, and her glorious gifts, as so many tools that were to bring gold to himself. There are men, you know, to whom their wife's honour is

like their own—only a chattel to be sold, when they can! She loved me, and knew that I loved her. I had urged her to leave her husband for me with all the eloquence I knew; I don't deny that. I was justified. Although he hated me, beause I treated him like the cur he was, he was ready enough to sacrifice her to any one of the richer *roués*, who would have purchased her of him, just as one may purchase some beautiful wild hawk of a brutal keeper. But I ought not to speak to you of these things.'

'Go on,' she said quietly. Her great eyes were glowing where she sat in the shadow of the boughs, and her lips were parted.

'She loved me. It cannot hurt her to say it now. And, indeed, she could not have loved me much, or she never had done what she did; for one night in the height of that London season, seven seasons ago, she disappeared. Not a living soul knew whither she went. The town supposed I had taken her, but it was not so; I knew no more than the rest of them why nor where she was gone. I had left her that night in her own drawing-room, after the theatre was over. There had been other people present. I had been unable to see her alone, and I relied on seeing her, as usual, with the morrow. I recollect that she came out on to the balcony, and stood there looking after me as I went down the street. There was an awning over the balcony, for it was warm weather: the moonlight was strong and bright; she wore black, that drifted about her like a cloud, and she had a great gorgeous Brazilian lily that I had given her in her bosom. God! what fools men are to remember the veriest trifles that once belonged to women who never cared for them!'

'Did she not care? You said she loved you.'

'Could she love me? Not as I count love. With the morning there came one of her letters to me; she often wrote to me and I to her, though we met twice every day; in it she told me that she had left the stage and the world for ever; that her husband had given her no choice betwixt flight and a lucrative dishonour; that she refused my love not less than she refused this abhorred passion that was pressed on her; and that she implored me not to seek to pursue, or to discover her. That was all. Am I not right to say she never loved me? Of course I did not obey her.

I set all possible modes of inquiry at work. First, I went straight to their house and thrashed *him* till he was left half dead; then I began my search for her. It was utterly useless; it has been so ever since.'

'She could not go to any evil?'

'Evil? No! Evil was not possible to her. She was the truest and the proudest woman that ever lived. Why she went I know no more than the dead; but I would stake my life on the purity, on the nobility, of her reasons, however exaggerated they may have been.'

'And have you never found her?'

'Never. Once I heard of her accidentally; if the man who spoke were right, she was living then—in penury and wretchedness. I have tried every means, but all have failed. It doesn't matter, I suppose; they say that these things don't—greatly. Only, you see, I cannot forget her; and I cannot find heart in me to give to any other woman; and I talk to you, child, and look on you, not stirred one whit by your beauty; knowing you are fair indeed, but caring no more for that than an old worn dotard of ninety. Do you know that I would give my soul to love, and I cannot; just because this one lost woman will never release me?'

There were the fierce vibrations of an intense passion and sorrow under the half-quiet, half-reckless words: and his face was very dark where the shadows of the spring-born leaves drifted over it.

I cannot tell why, but I thought of the woman who had died in the bitterness of the winter time, in the poverty and the misery of Paris.

Through the silence there came at that moment the soft sound of moving oars and of rippling waters; amongst the twilight of the boughs a boat, with plumes of young green branches at its bow, glided gently to the little landing-place.

'Where are you, Derry?' asked Beltran's voice. 'That duffer Ned has given over—says he can't pull back to town. Must get across and catch the express. He declares it's a sprain; I believe it's nothing but laziness and champagne. Take his oar, will you? They can have a waterman with your set.'

'All right,' responded Denzil, as he assisted Gladys into

the boat amongst all the big bulrushes, and the broad water-docks, and the pretty, feathered, rosy-hued river reeds; and taking his coat off, seated himself on the bench that Guilliadene had vacated.

As he pulled us back to town in the stilly balmy evening with his handsome head bare in the moonlight, and his grip giving true as ever the old marvellous Oxford stroke, he laughed as pleasantly and as often as any. It was Gladys whose eyes were dreamy, and whose face was troubled, as she sat under her fragrant banner of the hawthorn boughs, with a dark cloak drawn about her, and the field flowers that her friends had gathered for her dying in the coming of the night.

That night her acting lacked somewhat of its force, and had a languor and a lifelessness in it that were new to her.

As soon as her own share in the play was over she went to her home; Beltran was not in the theatre that night, and when he was absent she never received there.

She sat very silent, very thoughtful, before the fire that still burned in her pretty drawing-room, for the evenings were chilly, though the days were warm. Bright and full of rich hues though the chamber was, it seemed very still and solitary after the blaze and buzz of the crowded theatre.

Vaguely, perhaps, she felt how great this loneliness was in which she lived, at years when other women have all the light of home about them, all the tenderness of their mothers, all the gay companionships of their girlhood. It seldom weighed on her, because her life was brilliant and full of pleasures of its own kind; but to-night she seemed to feel how utterly alone in truth she was.

Her eyes were dim and full of languor as she looked at the delicate tender primroses of the woods and meadows, where they had been placed in an old costly vase of Venice glass.

'Whom did *he* ever love?' she murmured, with her lips against my forehead. 'Did he love like that? So that he never again can forget?'

Denzil's words had stirred her heart from its rest; but it was for another, not for himself, that it awoke, troubled and still but half-conscious.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

'VICTRIX.'

'WELL, my dear!' said Fanfreluche, frantically rushing to me next day with breathless excitation and her most diabolical grin. 'We have done pretty well, haven't we? Marchioness of Isla! Marchioness of Isla! When we began life, as *you* say, with bare feet, and home-spun skirts, and potatoes for dinner, in the Peak; and, as *I* know, with a shilling a week, and penny gaffs, and a glass of gin for a treat at Highbury Barn.'

'What on earth can you mean?' I asked in some fear, thinking indeed that she had lost her senses.

'I mean what I say,' she snapped angrily. 'Marchioness of Isla! It is pretty well for a woman who began life by selling *you* in a market-place. Pooh, child, don't look so scared! Your friend of the Derbyshire wakes has won the great marriage-prize of the year. True; certainly it is true. The town is talking of nothing else. Avice Dare—Laura Pearl—Cléopâtre; what does it matter what one is called so long as one ends as Marchioness of Isla? What do I mean? O, you little fool! I mean this—Malcolm Kenneth, sixteenth Marquis of Isla, comes of age this winter; he has had a long minority; he has been educated by a foolish mother and a rigid Calvinist; he has seen no more of life than a young nun; he is a stubborn, simple-minded, frank, foolish boy; the first thing he does, on becoming his own master, is to go to Paris. Paris, in all the wonder of her exquisite spring season, for a lad who had only seen and known grim Scotch castles and sour Scotch matrons! The first night he went to the opera: there, in her box, blazing in the splendour of her beauty, and the living light of her sapphires, surrounded with princes and gentlemen, he saw—"Cléopâtre." From that moment the world only held for the boy that one woman. She had the wit and the ambition to see that here was a greater prize than mere pillage. The boy was mad with his first delirium she could do as she chose with him. She chose to marry him; she has done so. The marriage is valid; no efforts

of his family will dissolve it; and the woman whom you once knew as the "light o' love" of the lad at the mill in the Peak, is now a Peeress of England and Scotland, Marchioness of Isla, and Countess of Allanmore! That is to-day's news. Ah, my dear! I told you right that all the comedies of the playwrights, and all the romances of the fictionists, are not one tithe so amusing, nor one thousandth part so startling, as are the comedies and the romances that meet one at every turn in Life!'

Fanfreluche had in nothing exaggerated. To this amazing altitude had the betrayer of Reuben Dare arisen.

One sunny noon in that pleasant glad season when the leaves are as fresh as the toilettes, and the laughs are as light as the showers, I sprang down from the little carriage and roved to and fro, whilst the men passing by clustered round Gladys.

I roamed at leisure, viewing that scene, always familiar yet never hackneyed, because, on its wide stage the three imperious *impresarj*, Gold, and Ruin, and Death, never permit the same drama to rest nor the same players to tarry; but bring ever fresh names and fresh faces, if the old farces and tragedies still will react themselves under new titles.

The place was full: and all its crowd turned by one accord to gaze at a carriage which drove slowly down the road, as though to challenge that universal observation from that fashionable mob. It was an equipage fitter, with its outriders, its postillions, its superb liveries, its fracas, its display, for a ducal procession on the Heath or the Town Moor, than for a simple noon drive in Hyde-park.

Its occupants were a fair lad, with a stupid, feeble, ruddy face, and a woman of splendid beauty, enveloped in black guipures and black sables, for the last of which a chill in the air gave excuse.

'There go the biggest fool and the blackest witch in Christendom,' muttered old Lord Shamrock. 'Good God! If Ronald Isla had foreseen it, sir, he'd have strangled this lad—strangled him in his cradle!'

'Boy looks like an Ayrshire gilly,' said Lord Guilliadene, to whom he had spoken. 'Fearfully bad form: never saw worse.'

'Malcolm Isla, his father, married a shepherd's daughter, off his own hills,' growled Lord Brune. 'Crosses always come out.'

'But his grandfather, poor Ronald, was a gentleman all over,' said Lord Shamrock, 'though an awful fool to be sure. Do you know how he died?'

'No!' the earl responded with a yawn.

'He was shot in a duel,' answered old Lord Shamrock. 'Shot dead, outside Bruges. I was his second. "It was all a mistake," he gasped as I caught him. "But I couldn't have explained unless I'd shown up a woman!" So he died, saying nothing. And that's the man whose grandson has made a wife and a peeress of—'

The language wherewith he designated her I dare not record for a polite age that blushes at Shakespeare and smiles at Schneider.

'I suppose she came over to make a dash here out of bravado,' murmured Denzil, with a glance back towards Beltran. 'The marriage only took place the other day. She will do just as she chooses with that wretched boy, no doubt.'

'Isla House in Belgrave-square is being redecorated,' said one of the loungers. 'She is very stupid not to keep abroad: she will always be "pilled" here.'

'She will get the society she cares for,' said Denzil. 'All the men on the town will go and see her; and she will have a whole *cohue* of parasites—clergymen among them, if she like to become a "patroness" of churches and hospitals, and I daresay, in time, even a bishop will dine with her.'

'And I will bet you what you like,' interrupted Guilliadene, 'that she will hold huge gatherings at Blair-Isla, and have festivities that will make all Scotland stare.'

'If she don't give Isla's people a chance for a divorce,' put in Lord Shamrock. 'They will catch at a straw. I should not wonder if she were divorced by the autumn and married afresh by next Easter.'

'Nor should I. She's awfully handsome,' said Claud Lucy, 'and awfully clever. She got De Ferras, and Bernaldés, and Prince Egon of Wallachia killed, and Lord knows how many she's ruined.'

'Clever! She's the most stupid and most illiterate crea-

ture that ever breathed,' said Denzil contemptuously. 'She never said a decently sensible thing in all her days.'

'But she never did one not sensible,' said Lord Brune quietly. 'All her victims were solvent; she never forsook a man till she had plundered him as far as she could; she returned all small presents as "insults;" she never got any one killed unless he were useless and troublesome; and she finally has married this lad. O, a clever woman, certainly; I do not believe she will be divorced. I believe she will now train for the Morality Stakes. They generally do when they have won a Gold Cup.'

I overheard these remarks; my mistress did not.

'How beautiful a woman!' she murmured to Beltran, looking earnestly at the carriage as it passed. 'She looks strangely at you. Who is she?'

'The Marchioness of Isla,' he answered her with all gravity, but with a little, serene, contemptuous smile about his mouth.

'I have never seen her before, I think?'

'No. But you have heard of her—as "Cléopatre."'

Fanfreluche had in nowise exaggerated: the woman whose first lovers had been found amidst the boisterous dalesmen and savage miners of the north, was now high in title, high in affluence, high in station. All the world knew her infamy; but by the gracious fiction of your divine institution she had become blameless and without reproach—by marriage.

It seemed that she had drawn in this hapless boy beyond escape; and had wedded him with such scrupulous heed of all formalities that nothing which his frantic family could do could obtain any reversal of the hideous folly that had given all dignities and all nobilities to the wanton of the northern wakes.

He was but a lad; he was stubborn and simple; he had been reared in grim creeds and in childish ignorance; in the blinding blaze of his first liberty, in the sudden attainment of his mighty heritage, this woman had seized him as she might have seized some poor dazed bird long kept in darkness and confinement, and suddenly cast forth to stretch its untried wings in the full sunlight. He had been powerless to resist: he had been held, and hooded, and fastened to that cruel and close-shut hand without a struggle.

You have seen such things before in this society of yours —seen them at least often enough for it to have become a known and dreaded thing that when the beardless boy of rank and wealth sits in the public places of pleasure beside the gorgeous thing of infamy whom you have made a household word, it will be possible—almost probable—that she will not pause at stripping him of riches, at forcing him to pawn all future heritages, at making him a gamester, a bankrupt, a beggar, an outlaw, but will go farther, and compel from him the old gallant name of his fathers, the old fearless repute of his race; the old gems that flashed in his ancestors' faulchions, the old home where his mother reigned in honour.

It is not moral to tell you this, you say? Ah, no!—life itself is not moral. But it is true—it is undeniably true—that whilst you repulse with a shudder the poor painted outcasts of the street, you gaze with interest on the famous wanton throned in her jewels at the opera; and from this, your countenance and complaisance, whilst the painted outcast goes to the police-court and the prison, the jewelled wanton may steal the honour of your name unchastised, and wed your young heir to eternal shame, unarraigned.

Need you marvel then that, beholding this contrast of issue, women—low, ignorant, made full of greed by want, made sick for money and pastime by the inordinate envies and tawdry fashions of the poor of this age—say dimly to themselves, 'Let us only be vile enough, we shall do well. All that are wanted are beauty and luck.'

And verily they have cause to say it.

It has often seemed to me that you might do much to scare the female vultures from their prey upon the youthful curled darlings of your proud races, if you declared by law all marriages invalid wherever the vileness of the wife's previous life was a fact beyond dispute. It would be simple; it would be rightful: for shall the meed of the just pass to the unjust? shall the guerdon of honour abide with the thief? Shall Faustina claim a place beside Lucretia? Shall Phryne with the wine-dropping roses of shame on her temples, presume to mate herself with Arria Pæta, with the white lilies of courage and innocence bound on her beautiful brows?

But it is not done; and meantime the courtesan can

laugh her cynical laughter, and say in her heart, 'I will sin whilst it shall please me. When it ceases to please I can take the communion and—marriage!'

As for me, when I heard the world thus talk of her, I felt stupid and aghast. My thoughts were busied with that old dead time, when the woman who now drove there in her pomp and power, watched by all eyes, and spoken of by all lips, had stood in the cottage-door under the rose-thorn, and chaffered for glass beads and penny ribbons, with the old pedlar of the Peak.

From the hour when she had stolen the coins of her brother's thrift and toil from under the moss by the apple-tree, this woman's life had been one long theft. Her hands had spared naught that her eyes saw and coveted; she had had no pity for youth; no mercy for ruin; no remorse at love; no shame at trust; she had had but one law for her life—the law of greed. If you would only bear in mind that this is the law of all such women's lives, the world would be spared much maudlin sentiment, and men much undeserved reproach.

That law Avice Dare, in all things the type and model of her class, had obeyed, without one pause for its infringement by any sort of gentler thought or better deed. She was cruel, because all low untutored human creatures ever are more cruel than any desert beast, or python of the swamps: she was licentious, because women of her likeness, having but splendid vitality and bodily beauty, without any conscience, or intelligence, or soul within them, are always surrendered to the dominion of the senses: but beyond all, more than all, she was possessed with greed; the same greed which had made her gloat over the mock stones and brazen jewelry of the pedlar's pack, and steal, and pillage, and forsake all duty, and betray the loyal heart which trusted her, that she might flee to the ways of iniquity, and to the wages of shamefulness. Greed of the basest sort—greed for the things of the senses; for raiment, and food, and wine; for horses, and chariots, and treasure; for the laughter of fools, and the licence of venal kisses; for the envy of other women of the gems on her breast, and the gold in her hands.

And having fallen upon an Age which has elected to deify the courtesan, and wherein hard avarice, and keen passions

for pelf and self, do prosper more greatly than any genius or attainment, or quality of the mind or character, this woman was rewarded for her sin.

She had not intelligence, she had not knowledge, she had no kind of pity nor any sort of comprehension; she was brainless as any savage that squats in his African hut; she was only capable of such joys as the drowsy jewelled snake may know in his Mexican swamps; she could eat, and drink, and could glitter gemlike in the sun, and could uncoil from gorged torpidity to kiss—or kill.

In a word, she was the courtesan of the nineteenth century, who, to all the licence and all the cruelty of the wantons that turned their thumbs downward for their brawny paramours to die in Rome, has added all the vulgarities of modern ribaldry and all the chicaneries of modern civilization.

Hence, being thus suited to the Age which had begotten her—being thus its creature and its likeness—she had thriven in it as the snake thrives in hot and poisonous waters, which for all pure and healthier things breed death.

Luck, of course, there had been in it; luck is the divinity of the soulless. Many women, having all the will to do the evil that she did, find themselves barred out for ever from the chance. Many fishers in the sea-depths of vice angle all through the day and bring to land nothing for their pains. Many like her in their natures, and their passions, and their aims, but lacking either her supreme physical beauty, or her supreme good fortune, wander drenched and starving in the slimy rains of city streets at midnight, cursing vice, as others curse virtue, because its service is wretchedness, and its wage famine. Luck, truly, there had been in this amazing fate, which lifted the once sullen, ragged, unkempt peasant on to this eminence where all the world observed her—clothed in the purple, and environed with the 'divinity that doth hedge' the royalty of Gold.

But beyond all favours of chance, or circumstance, all aids of accident or opportunity, the chief reason of her fortune was that this woman was so entirely harmonious with her time, so utterly its true daughter in rapacity, in licentiousness, in egotism, in coarse hard lust of gold, and in dull, dead indifference to anything save gain. She had been callous to all misery she dealt, all need she left, all horror

she entailed throughout her whole career—as callous when she had drawn from the earth her brother's silver pieces that had been saved by the hardness of his toil and the sweet patience of his self-negation, as now when she trod under her foot a boy's guileless youth, and the lofty name of his race, and raised her head in the world's sight, crowned. Crowned in greatness, if crowned with a diadem from whose jewels the eagle-stone* of Honour had dropped, with the same moment that had raised it up to her shameless brow. Ah, well !—let but Kaiser or Courtesan seize their crown and wear it, they shall find courtiers and coveters enow; and for its gems—the eagle-stone that knights held high as a stainless talisman, and that kings wore in the old, fair, fearless years of old, is out of use and out of fashion now.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BONNET BLANC.

'WHAT a wonderful woman that is!' said Fanfreluche to me a day or two later, with a sigh of passionate envy. 'What do you think she has done? Not content with all the goods of earth, she has even secured herself immortality—*she has hired Philippe Rissôle!*'

And Fanfreluche for once held her breath in an absolute awe of amaze.

'Immortality!' I ventured to echo in bewilderment. 'And who, then, pray, may be Philippe Rissôle, who can confer it?'

'O heavens!' cried Fanfreluche, in a whirldwind of contempt, 'what a thing it is to have lived in a puppet-box and a garret! O; you ignoramus, you barbarian, you most miserable of outsiders! *Who* is Philippe Rissôle? He is the artist that made the Guards' Club sublime with his sauces; he is the poet that made the French Embassy divine with his *hors d'œuvres;* he is the *maestro* that made

* The ancient *pierre d'aigle*, supposed to be found in eagles' nests —ED.

the Emperor of Russia cry, "I am greater than Cæsar," as he ate a cutlet in curl-papers; he is the genius of whom it has been said that the Pope, embracing him, after a *jour maigre* of thirty services, mourned with tears that it was forbidden to send the Golden Rose to heads crowned with the glorious *bonnet blanc* of the kitchen. He is Philippe Rissôle, THE COOK! And she has hired him—she!—whom you once saw washing her own potatoes to eat with black bread for a noonday dinner. O Lord! can the "masses" ask for a more absolute millennium of democracy than this topsy-turvy age in which an Avice Dare can live to hire a Philippe Rissôle!'

I was silent: I was not alive to the imperial greatness of a Rissôle, but I was struck dumb with a curious sense of marvellous strangeness as I thought of the woman whom I had once seen greedily devouring the gilded gingerbread and the painted peppermint-sticks of a wake fair-stall, now being qualified to dazzle the sight of the world with banquets fitted for princes!

'They call her a stupid woman,' pursued Fanfreluche. 'Pshaw! she has the very wit and wisdom that suits her Age. She is a splendid strategist; there is not a man in the town, however lofty his rank, that will not accept invitations to dinners designed by Rissôle. She knows that those who are wise, seeking to rise, and desiring to win the *kudos* of their compeers, will not ask themselves, have they genius? have they beauty? have they wit? have they power? but will ask themselves only—can they give a good dinner? If they are sure that they can—not a good dinner in the mere ordinary meaning of the word, but a dinner original, voluptuous, harmonious, dulcet, a "thing of beauty and a joy for ever,"—then they may know that sooner or later the world will be theirs. She sees this: she does not trust to her beauty or her splendour, to her riches or her wickedness, the world is full of such as these; but she obtains Rissôle! The only living man in Europe who can make an epic worthy of epicures! To secure the cook of the century is to obtain the roc's egg. Who is the most successful diplomatist? He who most successfully entertains. Is there anything so humanising as a perfect dinner? Anything that so tends to reconcile differences, and to smooth aside prejudices? When a man eats exquisitely, he

feels harmoniously and he thinks placidly. What epicure would propel a war that should ban the truffled turkeys of Paris from his own frontier? What gourmet would urge a "crusade for ideas" when the campaign would deprive him of the *pâtes* of Strasburg, of the *ortolans* of Lombardy or of the *caviare* of Russia? A statesman will cast a nation recklessly into feud and famine when it is only the bread-rate of the poor that will have to rise, only the porridge-pot of the poor that will have to be empty; but when he is a dinner-giver of consummate art, and understands the imperishable qualities of the truffle, and the imperative necessities for the *foie gras*, he will be no party to dissension that shall leave his *menus* incomplete, and his cook disconsolate and unnerved. No one understands so well as an epicure the mutual dependence of the nations; for what dinner is worth anything to which all nations do not contribute? Strike any one nation off the list of commerce, and you strike some one dainty off the bill of fare. Were I a sovereign all my ambassadors should be the best dinner-givers of their times. Years ago I heard the appointment of Lord Courtly to the Viennese Embassy sorely questioned and sneered at; a man whom I know well openly attacked Lord Parmesan, then chief of F. O., upon the unjustifiable choice. "What simple qualification does Courtly possess for such a post?" he persisted. "What single talent does he evince for such an eminence? You cannot point out one?" Parmesan laughed. "Yes, I can; he possesses Rissôle." Parmesan was shrewd and all-seeing amongst men; he knew that the pivot of all diplomacy turns within a stewpan. Avice Dare knows as much. Ere the season be over every man of note will have dined with the Marchioness of Isla. Philippe Rissôle will give her eminence in the present, and in the future immortality—for will not the dinners that he conceives and executes for her table be shrined in the Golden Books of gastronomic science for ever?

'The worst is,' added Fanfreluche, ending with a sigh her impassioned periods,—'the worst is, how can a woman who once peeled her own potatoes be ever capable of appreciating the genius of a Rissôle? She loves eating, indeed, but what has a vulgar love of eating in common with the exquisite delicacies of gastronomical discrimination? The

palate requires education from birth upwards: your only true epicure is ever of gentle breeding. But now—now—the *canaille* have all the cooks; and Milord Rôture and Miladi Cocotte give dinners that would have brought tears of ecstasy to the eyes of Brillat-Savarin, and all the while could not themselves tell for their lives an ortolan from a sparrow, or a canvas-back duck from a quack-quack of the gutter!'

I paid little heed to her; but her prophecies proved correct.

Isla House was opened with all the fresh magnificence of Louis-Quinze decoration; the great cook created a series of dinners which surpassed anything that he had ever conceived for prince or minister; and whilst the town talked of her dauntless effrontery, of her *luxe effrayant*, of her infamy, and of her ostentation, half its lords and gentlemen went to criticise the wonders of her table; and their fair wives regretted her shame and her sin because these debarred them from honouring banquets prepared by Philippe Rissôle.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NELLIE'S PRAYER.

'I WAS at the Private View yesterday,' said Fanfreluche with a grin. 'How'd I get in? As I get everywhere, simpleton. I hide myself under a woman's dress,—for all the world as if I were a sin! And I keep so quiet; not a soul suspects me a bit more than the public suspects the money that changes hands when the journals write a statesman into office, or an archbishop into the primacy. I was at the Private View. There is nothing there that comes near Gladys' portrait. All that mob of ministers, fine ladies, critics, dandies, and *litterati* were unanimous about it! It kills every other picture near; and yet there is so little colour about it! "That wonderful white!" they all say; but it is the wonderful face above the white that charms them. Lady Otho was there; and Beltran was entangled with her party. He is always very courteous

and friendly with her; he always is with his old loves. She looked very long at the picture; but she said nothing, except a few words of praise to the artist; but awhile after, in the miniature-room, he stood beside her, some way apart from any others. Then she addressed him suddenly:

'"That girl is very beatiful!"

'"You have seen her on the stage, surely?" he answered carelessly.

'She replied to him with a touch of impatience: "On the stage,—of course! But they are so made up there—one never knows—"

'He smiled.

'"She does not need to 'make up.' Have you any idea how young she is?"

'I saw her long hazel eyes flash fire.

'"Is she not the girl you spoke to me of most romantically once—long ago? The sister of that dead boy, of that poet?"

'He laughed.

'"*I* 'romantic!' surely that can never have been! Yes—she is the same."

'"And is it true what the world says of you and her—now?"

'She spoke hurriedly and almost fiercely; impulse must have been strong on her, or she would never have deigned to stoop to such a question.

'"Not in the least true," he answered in his most negligent fashion; "though I don't know whom it can concern."

'"Not true!" she echoed; "when you lavish all your wealth on her, spend all your time with her, are seen everywhere beside her!"

'"Not true," he answered again more coldly. "As for wealth—I have none left, and if I had she would only take the fair wage of her talent."

'She laughed a little; that laugh that it never does one good to hear.

'"Indeed! Ah! pardon me if I cannot believe in your platonics."

'"Perhaps it is natural you should not," he murmured, as he drew her attention to a miniature. She turned to the art-subject with ease and indifference; but her cheek burned hotly under its delicate rouge: she spoke no more

of Gladys. Do you think it was severe? Well—she should not have provoked him. Women will never understand the wisdom of the *non quieta movere*, and they never will let "the dead past bury its dead," and comprehend that to open closed graves is unsightly.

'But if she could still care for him?'

'My dear, as I told you, she cares enough to dislike to see him care for any other. Every woman loves enough for that. Even Avice Dare would know *so* much of the grand passion. "Love!"—it is such a pretty synonym for all kinds of envies, and egotisms, and jealousies and vicious desires. They are choice in their graceful synonyms, these dear human beings. They wrap a nauseous fact up in a gilded phraseology, until they take the pill like a bonbon. Pshaw. without that felicitous art do you think they would ever have managed to cheat themselves into forgetting their cousins the apes, and only acknowledging their cousins the angels?

'There are men who hold to, and revere, straight simple truths,' I said stanchly, for I thought better of men than she did.

'Are there, my dear?' she replied with a grin. 'I never met them. I have heard a very great many men and women call the crows carrion birds, and the jackals carrion beasts, with an infinite deal of disgust and much fine horror at what they were pleased to term "feasting on corpses;" but I never yet heard an one of them admit their own appetite for the rotten "corpse" of a pheasant, or the putrid haunch of a deer, to be anything except the choice taste of an epicure!'

'But they do cook the corpses!' I remonstrated; whereupon she grinned with more meaning than ever.

'Exactly what I am saying, my dear. Their love of synonyms has made them forget that they are *carnivori*, because they talk so sweetly of the *cuisine*. A poor, blundering, honest, ignorant lion only kills and eats when the famine of his body forces him to obey that law of slaughter which is imposed on all created things, from the oyster to the man, by what we are told is the beautiful and beneficent economy of Creation. Of course, the lion is a brutal and bloodthirsty beast of prey, to be hunted down off the face of the earth as fast as may be. Whereas man—what does

he do? He devours the livers of a dozen geese in one *pâté;* he has lobsters boiled alive, that the scarlet tint may look tempting to his palate; he has fish cut up or fried in all its living agonies, lest he should lose one *nuance* of its flavour; he has the calf and the lamb killed in their tender age, that he may eat dainty sweetbreads; he has quails and plovers slaughtered in the nesting-season, that he may taste a slice of their breasts; he crushes oysters in his teeth whilst life is in them; he has scores of birds and animals slain for one dinner, that he may have the numberless dishes which fashion exacts; and then—all the time talking softly of *rissóle* and *mayonnaise*, of *consommé* and *entremet*, of *croquette* and *côtelette*—the dear *gourmet* discourses on his charming science, and thanks God that he is not as the parded beasts that prey!'

'Well,' said I sulkily, for I am fond myself of a good *vol-au-vent*,—'well, you have said that eating is a law in the economies—or the waste—of creation. Is it not well to clothe a distasteful and barbaric necessity in a refining guise and under an elegant nomenclature?'

'Sophist!' said Fanfreluche, with much scorn, though she herself is as keen an epicure and as suave a sophist, for that matter, as I know,—'I never denied that it was well for men to cheat themselves, through the art of their cooks, into believing that they are not brutes and beasts of prey—it is well exceedingly—for their vanity. Life is sustained only by the destruction of life. Cookery, the divine, can turn this horrible fact into a poetic idealism; can twine the butcher's knife with lilies, and hide the carcass under roses. But I do assuredly think that, when they sit down every night with their *menu* of twenty services, they should not call the poor lion bad names for eating an antelope once a fortnight.'

And, with the true consistency of preachers, Fanfreluche helped herself to a Madeira stewed kidney which stood amongst other delicacies on the deserted luncheon table.

We were in the inner portion of Beltran's chambers; I occasionally strayed across the length of the park, and found my way thither. I had grown wary of all thieves' beguilements and stratagems; and I liked dearly to find myself once more in those well-beloved spacious apartments, with their deep, soft, blue colour, and their

charming confusion of bric-à-brac; their masculine litter and their artistic luxuries; their familiar scent of cigar smoke, and their quaint bits of priceless vertù.

For picturesque charm, and for true comfort and luxuriousness, I do not think there is any mansion in the town which can approach some of those perfectly arranged chambers that look out on the Green-park, or stud the various streets of the quarter of St. James. They have all a woman's elegance and all a man's negligence: the combination is perfection.

Whilst she ate her kidney, and I dozed on a couch, there entered into the outer room his sister, the Countess of Leintwardine; a woman of noble presence, wearing her forty or more years with bloom and majesty. Beltran, who was at that moment going out to his phaeton below, met her face to face; he stood still and bent his head to her in silence.

She came quickly up to him; she was an impulsive woman despite her dignity.

'Vere—don't let *us* be estranged,' she said softly. 'I did not think what I said!—'

He gave her his hand instantly; he was not a man to refuse to meet such an advance.

'I am afraid you did think,' he said with a smile. 'It was the thought I resented—'

'O no—O no,' she said a little hurriedly. 'I never think anything against you. Surely you know that?'

'Why do you not take my word, then?' he asked quietly.

'They are such very strange circumstances,' she murmured; 'so very equivocal!'

He raised his eyebrows a little, and moved an armchair towards her in silence.

'No, thanks. I am in a hurry homeward,' she said, leaning her hand on the back of the chair. 'I only came to see if you were here—one never has a chance to speak a serious word in society. As you were alone I could not help saying to you—let my injurious words be forgotten, and believe, O, always believe, Vere, that you have no truer friend than I am, no one who loves you more dearly than I do. And if I grieve over—over—some things in what seems to me a wasted career, it is only, only, my brother, because I remember too tenaciously and too fondly the hopes and the promises of your youth.'

He listened, touched by the words, moved yet more by the tears that stood in the eyes of this haughty and worldly-wise woman of his race. He was silent a moment, then he answered her:

'You cannot be more dissatisfied with my life than I am; but—which of my contemporaries is more content with his own? Satiety lies like a curse on us all; and it is little odds whether it be born of ambition or of pleasure. Perhaps, if you knew all, you might not think mine so utterly wasted, though it is idle and barren of renown; but—that does not matter much; it is certainly selfish and useless enough not to be worth a defence. Yet—listen to me an instant. You know that I should not lie to you?'

'Nor to any one,' she said, looking on him with a proud and sad tenderness.

He bent his head.

'Well—you say, too, that you bear me some love. Listen to me, then. More than a year ago, I told you that had my mother been living I should have taken Gladys Gerant to her. You heard—but you refused to assist me; you refused to lend her your countenance. What you refused to do, I could not ask of any woman less dear to me. When I sought to interest any in her they met me with the question, "What does your sister say?" To such a question I could give no answer; you had deprived me of one. What has been the consequence? That in lieu of being honoured by the world as her gifts and her purity demand, she is classed by the world with its most venal order, and nothing that I can do or declare can move one hair's-breadth of the weight of calumny off her. Now, on my faith as a gentleman, this woman you condemn is as innocent as your own daughters; of her beauty and her genius you have judged publicly; to the exquisite grace and nobility of her mind and heart no words of mine could ever render justice. You have spoken of my youth; in her presence alone do its better instincts revive, does its dead promise still seem capable of resurrection. Beatrice, it is not too late. Will you—even now—go to her; have faith in her; lend her the shield of your high name, prove to the world that my sister at least believes that I do not lie? It is not too late—you occupy the station from which it is possible to stem the tide of slander. Let her once be seen with you,

and you will save her for ever from the vileness and the cowardice of calumnies which she is too innocent ever to imagine can assail her; and from which I—a man, and her reputed lover—am utterly powerless to defend her life. You believe me, you say—will you do this for my sake, and the sake of truth?'

He spoke for the sole time in his life with sad and passionate earnestness: it was not for himself that he pleaded; and his words followed one another eagerly, eloquently, unselfishly; with a prayer which one would have thought no woman ever could have heard in vain.

His sister listened, the tears in her haughty eyes; she bowed her head as he paused, and over her bent face passed tremulous shadows of yielding and of regret. She sighed, and stretched out her hands to him.

'Anything but that—anything! It is not possible—an actress—my daughters—think what the world would say of me!'

His teeth clenched on his lip; he was bitterly wounded.

'Need a woman of my race pause for *that!*' he muttered with passionate scorn. He had been unwise enough to hope: he had stooped his pride to plead. His disappointment was intense; his mortification supreme.

She laid her hands upon his arm.

'O Vere! I do believe—I do indeed. She is beautiful, exceedingly, and no doubt she is all else that you say, but the world holds her as your mistress; I cannot subject my children—'

'That is enough!' he said sternly. 'If you came here for peace, not for feud, you had best say no more!'

'But you forgive me? You will not be angered again?'

He smiled; his coldest and most evil smile.

'Angered? Because you prove so true to your sex and your order! O no—O no!'

She would have answered him, but he went to the door, bade his servant call the Lady Leintwardine's carriage, and led her with grave and graceful courtesy down the stairway to the street below.

'Do you know what Gladys is to him now, my dear?' said Fanfreluche grimly.

'Scarcely!' I murmured, bewildered.

'Then I will tell you,' she answered with caustic curtness.

'She is the only woman whom he has loved in all the length of his life.'

The voices of the dilettanti were echoed by the public crowd when the doors of the Academy were opened to these last. There was no picture so sought as that of the Cupbearer of Vortigern. Its recognition as a portrait was its chief interest to the multitude; but even those who only came to it for this coarser reason were touched into silence and admiration before that spiritual, proud, poetic face, that had so little in its look of earthly care or earthly thought. Over the lightest and lowest that came thither it had a strange subduing power, which hushed the common parlance on their tongues, and sent them mute and wondering away.

'This picture has increased your celebrity tenfold, Gladys,' said Beltran to her on the third day of its exhibition, when he strolled beside her through the green aisles of her pretty garden.

She smiled: the smile so pathetic in its meditation and its eloquence, that was on the mouth of the daughter of Hengist.

'I do not care for that! But—if it would make the people love me a little I should be glad.'

'Why do you want that?' Beltran asked her gently.

'I do not know,' she said with half a sigh. 'But—when you see those thousands looking at you night after night, all strangers, all nameless to you, yet all caring so little for you that, if you died ere the play were ended, they would only feel themselves cheated of their spectacle, you cannot help wishing that you had a little of their friendship, a little of their love, and were not only to them just a mere toy to be watched, a mere mechanism to be dissected.'

'With all your genius how little you are fit for the stage—for *our* stage! Great heavens!' he muttered, and he paced the lawn with his head bent as he spoke.

Then he came to her, and took her hands in his.

'Gladys, sometimes it seems to me like a crime to have brought your youth, your innocence, your divine nature into such a world as this of ours. O, my child, if ever you should reproach me!—'

She lifted her eyes to him in wonder; she seldom saw him thus moved. Then she stooped, and with an exquisite grace and obeisance in the action, touched his hand with her lips.

'Reproach! I! If you choose to kill me you would have a right to my life—you, who have bestowed on me everything on earth!'

'Hush, hush!' said Beltran almost harshly. 'You owe me nothing! God grant only that you may never blame me.'

She looked at him with a smile—that smile of ineffable exhaustless faith which ever makes the face it lightens half divine.

She loved him—it was so easy to see—with such perfect tenderness, such absolute adoration. She hardly knew it; he was 'her friend;' he used none of the language of lovers; he had never, as he had said, touched her lips with his own; he subjugated whatever passion he might feel with a stern self-control unlike any other thing in his self-indulgent and too reckless life. But love for him had grown into the religion of her existence.

Although he had never let her know the extent of the services he had rendered her, veiling them under generous fictions of her heart, and of its values, yet there was much that he could not conceal. Through him alone she had been raised as by magic from utter misery, want, obscurity, and desolation, to perfect ease, elegance, peace, and fame. In truth, her debt to him was measureless; and yet vaster than she even dreamed:—for she knew not of those depths of the world's dangers, or of the perils to her of his own passion, from which he continually defended her: defended her even against himself, because his simple creed, 'the good faith of a gentleman' forbade him to injure what lay defenceless at his mercy.

Ah! revile that old faith as you will, it has lasted longer than any other cultus; and whilst altars have reeled, and idols been shattered, and priests changed their teachings, and peoples altered their gods, the old faith has lasted through all; and the simple instinct of the Greek eupatrid and of the Roman patrician still moves the heart of the English gentleman—the instinct of *Noblesse oblige*.

She loved him, as I say, with sweetest, highest, most innocent, and yet most passionate devotion. In her eyes in her voice, in her unasked submission to him, in her countenance when he entered the place where she was, she betrayed it utterly, because utterly ignorant of the true

meaning of this concentration of her whole life in his which to her seemed simplest gratitude.

He had been much loved by many women; men of his type ever are so; many a woman of the world had been stung by his listless contempt, or beguiled by his indolent wooing, into a passion that had become the one real, vital, undying thing in all her artificial existence. Many a young girl, like poor Nellie, had spent on him all the freshness and fervour of her heart in a worship won merely by some gentle, careless word, or some kindly glance from those eyes commonly so cold and weary, in which he had meant no more than a man means when he gives a caress to a playful horse. But although far and wide he had awakened more love than he ever needed or heeded, he had not ever been loved as he was now by this creature who owed all to him; this poet who had all the strength and the elevation of genius, this child who had all the innocence and trustfulness of infancy. To few men is it given to be thus loved, with a love in which the mind bears as great and pure a part as the heart, and the intelligence is centred no less than the passions.

It was a jewel of price which fell in his path, and often I wondered whether he would tread it down in the earth at the last beneath his foot, or whether he would raise it up as he went, and cherish it in safety in his breast.

Sometimes I thought that the mists of the sins and the satieties of the world were still so darkly about him that he saw not its value, and would crush it carelessly in mere negligence: and at others I thought that he knew its beauty so well that he deemed his own hand not unsullied enough ever to touch and to take it.

The world held him closely: he had been with it and of it so long; he was so deeply steeped in its tired, sceptical, gay, dissolute temper; he had so longed learned to think with it that nothing was desirable save the distraction of the immediate moment, and the banishment of all emotional weakness.

But the world could not wholly absorb a man to whom, in the years of his youth, a lofty ambition had murmured its dreams, and an ideal love had shadowed its meaning. The ambition had died, stifled by pleasure; the ideal had been forgotten, supplanted by the senses. But sometimes I

thought that, when he gazed in the soul-lit eyes of Gladys, and heard the eloquence of her poetic thoughts, both the dreams and the faiths of his boyhood came back to him, and that he no longer sought an intrigue, an idleness, a selfish indulgence, a plaything for the passions, but at last also—loved. And loved at length so well, that he denied desire and restrained passion.

Meanwhile—whilst this struggle hid its violence in his proud silent heart, and this self-negation was covered by his proven armour of careless and caustic indifference—all his familiar friends had, of course, decided for him that he was a libertine, successful as usual, and that she was a toy for whom he showed somewhat more gentleness than common.

Indeed I often wonder to hear the complaints that are made as to the slightness and scarce sincerities of the friendship of this day.

I know not why you complain; there was surely never an era when your friends took more active interest in the discussion and disposal of your affairs, or took more trouble to ensure that the very worst possible should be said of you.

What more can you want? I assure you that society thinks much better of you the more evil it deems you. They called him now fearfully immoral, and respected him: if they had been told the truth and been brought to believe it, they would have certainly thought him a fool or a madman, and he would have sunk in their estimation accordingly.

When any of this that they said of himself drifted home to him he smiled; he was a man of the world: but now and then when he was alone he ceased for a moment to be a man of the world, and then his teeth clenched and his eyes darkened—because he thought of her.

'Good God! what a society we live in, in which a woman's innocence is a thing incredible!' he said once in a rare moment of impulsive utterance to his friend Denzil.

'Nay,' said Denzil with a smile that had all the bitterness of his dead love in it, 'let her lose her innocence, and she will find champions enough!'

Is the saying dark to you who read? Ah, then! you do not know society.

In the same week that the Academy opened I was lying

in the sun upon the lawn; the garden of the villa was blooming with jonquils and hyacinths; the hawthorn shrubberies were in their first budding bloom; the birds in the conservatory were singing amidst azaleas and camellias, and their music came through the open doors.

All was sweet and sunny; through one of the pretty mullioned casements I saw the luxurious little library within; Gladys sat there, reading at an old lectern; the rich dark velvet of her skirts had the colour of a Titian picture; and her delicate head seemed painted in gold upon the shadow of the deep-hued chamber. All was picture-like; all full of fragrance; all eloquent of a peace around which gold had drawn a charmed circle that pain could not break.

The roll of the carriages in the streets and roads beyond the walls was only dully heard; only pleasantly suggestive of the gay and endless life around.

As I half dreamed and half slumbered in my calm reverie, in my sunlit resting-place, there came to me Fanfreluche; pressing through the bronze scroll-work of the entrance gate with the daring independence of her habitual movements.

She approached more slowly than was her wont, and I saw that her brilliant eyes were for once dim and troubled.

'I have ill-tidings,' she said simply. 'Nellie is dead.'

'Dead!' I could only echo the word dully and stupidly.

'Yes—you asked me of her some time ago. She is dead of cold, and exertion, and fever; brought on by sitting up many nights with a little ballet-girl of the Palace Theatre; little Clarice Vaughan, who sickened and died first of a sort of low fever, they say.'

'Dead, dead, since when?' I muttered stupidly still; death seemed to me a thing that it was impossible to utter in the same breath with the name of that sturdy, rosy, blue-eyed young creature, saucy as a boy, blythe as a bird, untiring as a chamois, the little dauntless dare-devil, who feared neither man nor woman!

'Since an hour ago—only,' Fanfreluche answered me gravely, without a touch of mockery or any caustic word. 'She was ill but a brief time, I think. We were about to drive to Hurlingham to-day, when a little tattered boy came up; the grooms pushed him away, but Beltran listened to him. He said that Nell Brown was dying, and the old Granny had sent him; would my lord let Nell see him afore

she died? they thought she wouldn't live an hour. Beltran without a word, turned his horses' heads to that poor place where she dwelt. You saw it once? I was already in the phaeton; and descended and followed him as he went through the house; the old woman weeping and wringing her hands, and crying sorely because she was all alone in the world at eighty years, and moaning out how "Nellie, as was such a rare good child, if 'twarn't for her wild humours, had been so wilful and so mad, and had dug her own grave, say all as one would, a-tending little Annie Dell, as had been down with fever, and dead and buried mor'n two weeks agone." Beltran answered her with a few words of pity and consolation; and was ushered by her into the little chamber where you once saw Gladys Gerant saved from famine—and worse.

'Nellie was stretched upon her little truckle-bed; the sun came in over the roofs, the canary moped in his cage, the golden creeper hung withering for want of water; the little room was full of gay and tawdry ribbons, and gauzes, and tinsel, and all the glitter of stage costume. Her eyes were closed; her face had lost all its colour and roundness; there was a terrible blue pallor about the mouth. I thought that she was dead already; so did he.

'He went up to the bed, and stooped over her with a few gentle words. His voice seemed to electrify her; her eyes opened suddenly, with a blinded senseless look; her breath came fast and stifled.

'"Do you not know me, Nellie?" he asked her—so gently still. "My poor girl—why not have told us of your illness earlier? If I had only heard—if I had only dreamt—"

'She gazed at him with more of comprehension, and a sudden flash came over the grayness of her face that gave it once more something of its fresh and rosy hues.

'"I sent—I sent," she gasped. "I don't know how I dared—but you was always so good, my lord."

'"*Dare* is no word between you and me, Nellie," he answered her. "You had the courage to stay my hand once, in a passion that was making me a brute. I owe you much: only tell me how I can pay it."

'Her dull strained eyes, that had lost all their old, smiling, azure light, looked up at him piteously. She gasped for breath—for speech—once or twice vainly.

'"If only you would have let me help you!" he said to her. "But you would never take anything from me—not even such influence and interest as I may possess. It is not too late now, you are so young, so strong; I will get you all the aid, all the science, that the town holds—"

'She interrupted him with a plaintive motion of her bright curly head, that hung so languidly, like a wounded bird's

'"I'm as good as dead," she muttered, slowly and feebly; "else—I wouldn't have sent—never—never! But I want to say one word, sir—if you won't be angered—"

'"Say on, Nellie."

'There was an infinite pity in his voice; he had seen death often enough to know that the hope which he had held out to her was utterly vain.

'Still, with her eyes gazing up at him, so woefully, so prayerfully, she spoke her feeble and broken words:

'"I wanted to say—I've heard, my lord, all manner of evil things of *her*—and you. I've heard that—that—she have come to shame, though it's a gilded one; and I know—I know—as it's a lie!"

'"It *is* a lie."

'His face was very dark, his voice was very grave, as he answered her.

'"I said so!—I said so!" she murmured, her hoarse weak voice for the moment ringing with melody and strength once more. "I said as she was innocent and pure as any little child—lie all they would. And I kep' away from her,—because the likes o' me seen near her couldn't but do her harm; me being so common, and so ignorant, and so low like upon the stage; and she so beautiful, and so learned, and so great a lady, one may say. But—but you know as they do say all them things of you and her?—you know what she be thought to be? You know as she'll never be cleared of what they talk—never, never, never!"

'"I know!"

'The wooden rail of the chair, on which his hands rested, was broken by the clench of them upon it as he spoke.

'"But it won't ever be *true?*" she cried, raising herself upon one arm, and conquering for that brief space the agonies and the weakness of death. "You'll never make it *true?* It don't half matter if it isn't true. You see—you see, sir—it all came through me, her knowing of you

first. I don't think I could lie quiet in my grave if she ever lived to curse me for it. And she *would* curse me—when she came to see as she was scorned! O, promise me, my lord, as she sha'n't ever have no cause—promise me, promise me, she'll live and die in honour!"

'He was silent awhile; then he gently bowed his head.

'"I do promise you—so far as in me lies to keep her so."

'Her eyes closed; her chest heaved.

'"Thank God," she murmured. "I never doubted you—*I* never doubted."

'"If you did not, you had a rarer faith than any friend I hold! But, Nellie, speak rather of yourself; tell me what I can do for you. My poor child, you shall not die at such years as yours!"

'A wan, faint, bitter smile played over her drawn parched lips.

'"What matter years?" she muttered. "Maybe it's best. I'd have had to go on for ever, act—act—act. And even now—I was tired; very tired sometimes. Tell her I loved her always—will you? Don't let her think as I'd ceased to care—"

'"But tell me something you wish done—for yourself—for yourself alone!"

'He spoke earnestly, urgently: he saw that, with every second, sense and thought and sight were dying in her.

'"There's nothing," she gasped feebly. "Perhaps if you'd be good enow to keep old Gran from want? She's nobody but me; and I couldn't save—much."

'He stooped over her tenderly.

'"She shall never need whilst she lives. Is there nothing else—nothing?"

'Her curly head drooped more heavily still; her eyes looked once more up at him through the dulness and mists of death.

'"No—no. If so be you wouldn't mind—put your hand once on my forehead; I think I'd die easier so."

'He stooped lower, and in answer laid his lips softly on her brow.

'A flush of dreamy warmth drove for one moment the ghastly pallor from her face; she trembled from head to foot, and her eyes shone with a deep ecstasy; then—even

in that same moment—she shivered, stretched her limbs out, and died.

'He stood beside her, with his head bowed and his eyes dim; he, whom the world deems callous to all pain and indifferent to all tenderness, was touched to the heart by this simple, pure, unspoken love that had been borne him, all unasked and unrecompensed, so long and so silently by this little untutored, careless, audacious child of the populace, who had shown her lithe form and her fair face to the public gaze for the wage of his coin.

'The sun shone in over the roofs; the bird in its cage began a low tremulous song; the murmur of all the crowded streets came up upon the silence; and Nellie lay there dead; —the light upon her curly hair, and on her mouth the smile that had come there at his touch.

'Ah, my dear!' said Fanfreluche, as she ceased her story, with a half-soft and half-sardonic sadness, 'she was but a little, ignorant, common player, who made but three pounds a week, and who talked the slang of the streets, and who thought shrimps and tea a meal for the gods, and who made up her own dresses with her own hands, out of tinsel and tarlatanes and trumperies, and who knew no better than to follow the blind dumb instincts of good that, self-sown and uncultured, lived in her—God knows how!—as the harebells, with the dew on them, will live amidst the rank coarse grass of graveyards. She was but a poor little player, who had tried to be honest where all was corruption, who had tried to walk straightly where all ways were crooked. So she died to-day in a garret, my dear; and—have you heard that the young Lord of Isla has bought his wife an estate in the south that covers nearly one half of its county?'

* * * * * *

The night of Nellie's death there was a late card party in his rooms. I had strayed there, and stayed with Fanfreluche. There were none but men; they played long and gamed high; it was the rule in his set. It was almost morning when they broke up, and went on their ways. Denzil remained behind them. He had strolled away to the great piano, and was playing quaint, dreamy fragments of various melodies, whilst he smoked.

'Go on,' said his friend briefly, where he lay stretched on a couch by the hearth, and Denzil obeyed.

The grey smoke-clouds circled round them, as the dull vapour of satiety had drifted around all their pleasures and passions; the waves of sound rolled through the silence in soft, sad, weirdly eloquence; Beltran never stirred, he was lost in thought, Denzil rose and came to the hearth.

'What are you thinking of?' he asked.

'Your music.'

'No doubt! But besides?'

'Besides,' echoed Beltran slowly, as he raised himself and stood erect. 'Well, besides—I was wondering whether Cæsar was true to his Order when he said that it was not enough for his wife to be pure, since she was not also above public suspicion; or whether he was but a cowardly cur, who cloaked social timidity in a grand period, and shrank before the mud pellets of social opinion. Which was it—eh?'

Denzil looked at him quickly: 'You mean—?'

'I mean—that I must either be traitor to my race or traitor to a woman. I am undecided which to select. *Noblesse oblige.* It is an admirable creed, only a little unsatisfactory when it points two diametrically opposite ways. Get out with you;—it is late. Good-night!'

When his friend was gone he paced to and fro the length of the chambers.

'Am I a brute or a fool,' he muttered, 'when I know the purity of that perfect life?'

And he walked to and fro, to and fro, in that ceaseless, restless measure, till the sunrise glowed ruddily through the closed shutters.

As at length he passed to his bed he paused a moment before another portrait; a portrait of age, not of youth,—but of age in all its noblest benignity, its most venerable beauty. It was the portrait of his dead mother.

'The House might deem itself sullied; but *you* would not, were you living,' he murmured. Then he went and threw himself on his bed, and slept as the sun rose. His rest was troubled, and on his face in his dreams there were the shadows of sleepless passions,

CHAPTER XL.

'GITHA.'

'If this play should succeed it will be a triumph of true art,' said another critical writer to Dudley Moore, on the eve of a fresh play at the Coronet Theatre.

That great personage tapped his Louis-Quinze snuff-box with some impatience.

'Pardon me, but it is not possible to have Art at all on the stage. Art is a pure idealism. You can have it in a statue, a melody, a poem; but you cannot have it on the stage, which is at its highest but a graphic realism. The very finest acting is only fine in proportion as it is an exact reproduction of physical life. How, then, can it be art, which is only great in proportion as it escapes from the physical life into the spiritual?'

'But may not dramatic art escape thither also?' asked the critic, who was young and deferred to him.

'Impossible, sir. It is shackled with all the forms of earth, and—worse still—with all its shams and commonplaces. When we read *Othello*, we only behold the tempest of the passions and the wreck of a great soul; but when we see *Othello*, we are affronted by the colour of the Moor's skin, and we are brought face to face with the vulgarities of the bolster!'

'Then there is no use in a stage at all?'

'I am not prepared to conclude that. It is agreeable to a vast number of people: as a Frith or an O'Neil is agreeable to a vast number of people to whom an Ary Scheffer or a Delaroche would be unintelligible. It is better, perhaps, that this vast number should look at Friths and O'Neils than that they should never look on any painting at all. Now, the stage paints rudely, often tawdrily; still it does paint. It is better than nothing. I take it that the excellence, as the end, of histrionic art is to portray, to the minds of the many, poetic conceptions which, without such realistic rendering, would remain unknown and impalpable to all save the few. Histrionic art is at its greatest only when it is the follower and the interpreter of

literature; the actor translates the poet's meanings into the common tongue that is understood of the people. But how many on the miserable stage of this country have ever had either humility to perceive, or capability to achieve, this?'

The other critic smiled.

'I imagine not one in our day. Their view of their profession is similar to Mrs. Delamere's, when Max Moncrief wrote that sparkling comedy for her. "My dear," she said to him, "why did you trouble yourself to put all that wit and sense into it? We didn't want *that*. I shall wear all my diamonds, and I have ordered three splendid new dresses!"'

Dudley Moore laughed curtly.

'That is Delamere *aux bouts de ses ongles*. Our stage is but an asylum for men who are tired of sitting on clerks' stools, and women who are tired of using a seamstress's scissors. Yet such a stage as *this* we passively permit to be lauded by our public writers, while we inanely chatter of the decadence of taste. Good God! we might with as much justice make the House of Commons a cage for 500 parrots and apes, and complain of the decadence of oratory and of statecraft! And, indeed,' he added with a grim chuckle, 'the parrots and apes would more nearly resemble the politicians they would displace than do the players of our day resemble the art which they affect to represent.'

The eyes of the younger critic went to the figure of Gladys.

'Surely she has genius?' he murmured; 'you have yourself said so.'

'Sir,' said Dudley Moore very curtly, 'I have said so certainly; though what men say of a lovely woman is generally to be taken with a pinch of salt! But because acting is not art, it does not follow that an actor or an actress may not, here and there, be an artist. The great player is like the great orator—half a poet.'

It was a few days previous to that pleasant water-party that the mighty *magister* spoke thus, at a morning rehearsal which he had deigned to attend—the rehearsal of a new and picturesque play, which had been written for her by a scholarly and famous author, and cast in those old poetic and heroic moulds which had been broken into potsherds under the crow-bars of the felons, and the wheels of the street-cabs, of the modern drama.

The play was indeed fraught with many perils. To commence with, it read so well in the closet, that it was almost certain it must go ill on the boards; farther, it was cast in a bygone time—the Saxon time of England—and was penetrated with the high and simple spirit of that dead age.

It was slight of structure, inasmuch as the writer—wisely doubtful of the powers of the herd of men and women who, calling themselves artists, and receiving high wage in your capital, would be hissed off the boards of any minor provincial town of France or Italy—had centred all the strength, pathos, and sustaining power of the piece on the one central figure—a woman. Of course, this absorption of all interest into one focus was not artistically symmetrical; but what is a poet to do when he writes for a stage whereon the actors declaim with the accent of Cockaigne, and move with the grace of wooden *fantoccini?* His noblest diction will, he knows, halt in false quantities through no fault of his own; and the supreme art of the histrion—the art of gesture—will, he knows likewise, be either unattempted or caricatured.

With these difficulties before him, he had cast almost the whole burden of his dramatic creation on the one woman in whose hands he felt that such a trust was safe.

He was sensible of the offences of his play; he was aware that it was harmonious in treatment, subdued in colour, calm in action, pandering nowise either to the prejudices or the puerilities of the multitude; and yet it was hoped that all these offences might be pardoned to it through—not her genius, for genius alone is a *rococo* thing, who speaks in archaisms—but through the fashion of Gladys Gerant.

Besides, it was to be made a gorgeous spectacle; and it was trusted that in the splendid series of pictures, and the masses of men brought on in its groupings of camp and castle, monastery and witenagemot, the public would be for once induced to pardon intellect in the dialogues and nobility in the passions.

'Utterly unfitted for the present stage,' said Dudley Moore, when the play was accepted after a noon reading of it at the theatre. 'Utterly! But it is just possible that if you smother the sense of it under a weight of gorgeous decoration; that if you disgrace its classic treatment by a

quantity of barbaric magnificence, such as the age it is cast in can afford; if you get some novel effect in moonlight or on water, and give two set scenes to each act, calling them *tableaux*, you may contrive, by dazzling the sight of the audience, to make them pardon their being asked to sit out a work of eloquence and of sense. Indeed, if you could introduce a *jongleur* or mumming scene midway, and get that new conjuror, who is performing miracles at the Egyptian Hall, to appear in it with his bouquets and serpents, the piece might not perhaps quite ruin you; it might even keep the boards for a month.'

These sarcastic counsels had been followed seriously—all, indeed, except the adoption of the juggler—and the play was magnificently put upon the stage in a series of exquisite historic pictures, carefully compiled from Holinshed and Sharon Turner, Guillaume de Poitiers and the Roman De Rou.

'It will ruin you,' they said to Beltran, who laughed in his negligent fashion.

'When one is to break one's neck, it don't much matter whether it's over a five-bar or a six, that I can see.' And with the inborn recklessness that was covered under his quiet manner, he spared no cost accordingly.

So the play was to be put forth with the springtide of the year, and its various scenes—the encampment, the abbey, the vast untouched forests, the gathering of the monks for vespers, the noontide fight by the ford over the sumpter mules, the feasts of the Eorldermen in their Mead Halls—all were to afford spectacles that would to the uttermost serve to induce the public to pardon the startling heresies of meaning and of feeling in the words that were uttered. The scene-painter's skill had been strained to the farthest to purchase forgiveness of the poet's presence.

If you perfectly occupy the eyes of a London playgoer, he will not resent, because he will not note, that you offend his ear with the dead languages of eloquence and sense. Perhaps he may regret that such fine grouping and charming 'sets' are not more worthily wedded to some punning doggerel; but he will not resent actively, though he will doubtless feel that he has scarcely had all he should have had for his money.

Moreover, this play was prepared and announced in those

young April weeks, when first on men's lips came the rumours of the picture of the Cupbearer of Vortigern. Those who had seen it in the studio spoke widely of it in language that awoke interest and curiosity; and the portrait had scarce been revealed to the general public when the play of *Githa* was put forth, and it was known that she would appear in the old Saxon garb that was worn by the daughter of Hengist.

A trifle like this goes far to arouse and to rivet public attention; and served, amongst others, to make the town ready, and even willing, to excuse the mistake which had chosen an author in lieu of an adapter, a poem in the place of a police report.

The first representation was appointed for the day that followed on Nellie's death. Of that death he did not tell her: and it was too obscure for public rumour or record to take it to her ear. A little dancing-girl—one out of hundreds—worth nothing when the lissom energy was once out of her limbs, what name could she leave? What moment of recollection could the busy world give her?

He knew that he must tell her sooner or later, but he shrank—with that kind of tender cowardice which so peculiarly belongs to men who are for themselves sternest, hardest, and least apt to fear—from wounding in any way this heart that had known so much of sorrow in its childhood, and had only so lately basked in joy. He withheld from her all things that could pain her, with an excess of care that had its perils for her; for, so perfect did this life seem in which she dwelt, that insensibly she grew to believe that its beauty must endure, shadowless, for ever; and insensibly, in her trust in him, she lost the strength and self-reliance that she had once possessed amidst adversity.

When her brief life had been but a little frail field-blossom, left desolate on the crumbled walls of a fallen house, to bear night and storm as best it should, and to be blown on by all rude winds of heaven, it had been steadfast and unblanched. But now that it was a hothouse flower, guarded from every chilling breath, and environed with perpetual sunlight; now—I sometimes feared that it would break and perish at the first rough touch—wither in the first lone hour of midnight.

'You are not afraid of your powers to-night?' he asked

her in the afternoon of this day on which *Githa* was first to be given to the world.

She smiled in his eyes.

'When you tell me to be afraid I will be,—not until then.'

The trustful words smote his conscience; if he dealt truly with her—truly as he had promised to the dead girl—would he not bid her be 'afraid' now? Afraid, not of herself, but of him? I saw this thought told in his eyes.

'Do not depend so much upon me,' he said gently and sadly. 'You are a poet; you are an artist; you have genius; you must not rest your nobler existence on such a useless and prosaic life as mine. I am no poet, Gladys; I am only a tired, selfish, good-for-nought man of the world.'

She smiled still; that beautiful serene smile of divinest faith.

'It's ever the noblest who most undervalue themselves,' she said simply.

'O, child, I have no nobility!' he said, with a quick, impatient sigh. If you knew me as I am you would hate me.'

'*I!*'—it was only that one word she uttered, but in it there were all the glorious incredulity of a love which could never harbour credence of a stain on its idol, and—yet higher than this—the grandeur of a love which even if forced to condemn in judgment, would only still cleave the closer in tenderness. He looked at her and was silent; he had not the heart—what man would have it?—to shatter that exquisite, pure, untroubled faith in him. Perhaps also he thought—

'Almost thou makest me that which thou dost believe me.'

that night was the first night of *Githa*. When the people came to its representation they were a little uneasy at the period in which the play was cast, and at the name of its author, which was of classic and scholarly repute. But the *grand art de plaire* had been long studied at this house; and a reassuring consolation had been prepared for them in a new drop-scene, which represented Dufresny in his Garden of Roses.

I do not suppose that many of them knew who Dufresny was: but the rose-garden was charmingly painted, and the handsome grandson of *la plus fraîche rose de mon parterre*

was in his court suit and his lace ruffles: and these we know—to those who don't wear them—always seem suggestive of much elegance and amusement.

The play opened with a gorgeous festival scene, of the Saxon thanes with their purple peacock-broidered robes, their harpists, their skins of wolf and bear, their golden chalices, their rough and riotous revelry. This charmed the assembled house as a mere spectacle, and when, later, Gladys swept across the stage, with her slow, soft, haughty grace, and her white, purple-broidered robe, and her dark, lustrous, grave eyes gazing from under the golden fringe of her hair, they were in no mood to grudge her one iota of the triumph she might win.

And that triumph was great. Until now she had been but a gifted actress of extreme youth, for whom high patronage and favouring circumstance had done so much that it was almost a question if they had not done all. But with this night they knew that by her voice genius alone had spoken.

When the first two acts were over, friends and critics pressed eagerly around her. She bent her head with a dreamy smile: she was too truly an artist not to shrink from the language of flattery when it jarred on the consecration of her thoughts, the passion of her art.

Beltran scarcely spoke: but when her eyes met his she had the only tribute, the only answer, for which she cared.

Dudley Moore addressed her almost with emotion.

'You prove what none save fools—but many fools—doubt,' he said to her. 'You prove that the public can no more refuse to obey the influence of genius, than the tides can refuse to obey the laws of their flux and their reflux.'

And he was right.

Breathed through her, shadowed forth by her, having in her all its vital yet spiritualised being, the vague dreams of the poet took life and became great. Interpreted by her voice, her eyes, her eloquence, her gestures, the shadowy fancy of the writer became a living creature, pure as the dew, generous as the sun, innocent as the blossom, grand as the tempest.

And the listless, ironical, surfeited, debased mental temper of the world of this your day was enthralled and subdued by an incarnation so unlike to itself, so far removed from

its own narrowed passions and its own venal materialism; and yet which had reality within it, because it had the greatness, the truth, and the divine fire which can be evoked from your human nature in its highest forms and in its noblest moments—which, indeed, are rare, and found only in your impulses of heroism, in your hours of self sacrifice, but yet, though thus rare, still are existent.

What is beyond all humanity ever fails to move it; it is the reason why all the religions of your earth are things of the lip, which scarcely influence the life: it is what remains human, yet is human only in the highest sense, and by the deepest woe, that can sway your hearts as the winds the reeds.

It is scarce too much to say that such a creation was this which the mind of the poet had conceived, and which the living power of the actress placed visibly before the dimmer eyes and the grosser intelligence of those who, without her, would have missed its meaning.

There were cold cynics there whose eyes were dim with tears; there were frivolous women there whose tongues were hushed and whose fans were still; there was a fashionable throng there that was forced to feel, that was compelled to honour, that forgot to be inane, and did not dare to cavil or to sneer.

Do you imagine that a corrupt age cannot revere, that an artificial age cannot be stirred by truth, that an abject age cannot rise to comprehension under the compelling force of genius?—you are wrong to doubt. Was it not the vilest of the pagan ages that gave credence, and foothold, and tenure, to the faiths and the philosophies of Paul?

Even as men are to the kine of the fields, so is genius to men: when its eyes are on them they dare not refuse to obey, even if they obey in fear and in hatred. Stone it in the dark they will, indeed—because men are oftentimes lower than the beasts of stall and sty.

When the end had come, and the pent-up emotions of the spectators had found their vent in tumults of applause, in thunders of homage, the triumph that she had won was no ephemeral glorification of a fair woman, but was the involuntary witness borne by a multitude to power that had vanquished it.

As she left the stage for the last time, the echoes of the vociferations that still called for her, from an audience never weary of beholding her, were yet resounding through the house. Here face was very pale; her eyes were heavy; on all her beauty there was a look of languor, of exhaustion, of profound sadness: the forces whereby genius moves the people ever recoil upon itself.

The story of the swan's song in death may be a fable, doubtless; yet it is true in allegory of the suffering wherefrom is drawn the melodies that thrill the souls of men.

She turned with almost a shudder of distaste from the congratulations around her.

'Let me go away; let me go home,' she murmured to her friend as he stood by her. 'I could not bear the laughter—the flattery—in the room to-night.'

He led her almost in silence from the house.

It was a still, clear, moonlight night; above the narrow street on which the side door opened the stars were shining; it seemed strangely cool and calm after the crashing plaudits with which the theatre had re-echoed.

In that soft shadowy light her eyes met his. A quick shudder ran through him.

'O God,' he muttered half aloud, 'that the world and I were worthier of you!'

A sigh stirred her lips as she answered him:

'But for you what could the world have known of me?'

Her face was white as death; her eyes were languid with fatigue; the suffering which is ever the tribute that genius pays for its sovereignty was upon her; but as the moonlight fell on her uncovered head, with the golden gleam of its hair, her loveliness was greater than in her proudest hours. He looked at her, then led her to her carriage; he paused a moment irresolute, then for the first time entered it also.

As he sank beside her, his hands touched hers; his lips sought hers; he drew her to his embrace in the first impulse of passion that had ever escaped him.

Quivering and mute, she rested in his arms, and hid her face upon his breast. The high courage, the poetic strength, the eloquent powers wherewith a moment earlier she had swayed the crowd, forsook her; and the woman whose divine gifts had held a multitude in servitude shrank weeping to him like a tired child.

The swift horses swept fast through the night, flying fleet as the moments.

In the silence I could hear the loud hard beating of his heart; in the dusky gleam of the lamp I could see that his eyelids were wet with tears.

Brokenly, breathlessly, she sobbed as a child sobs on its mother's bosom. The proud, passionate strength of a woman breaks ever thus into weakness when the hour that needed the strength has passed by. He let it have its way, waiting patiently its exhaustion; but his arms pressed closer and closer around her, and his kisses burned upon her trembling lips.

When the carriage paused at length before her home, she broke from him, and fled swiftly through the leafy shadowy ways of her garden into the chambers of the house. He followed her rapidly into the little fragrant, velvet-hung room that served her as a study.

The lights were burning low, the air was heavy with many flowers, the casements were still open to the balmy spring night.

She stood upon the hearth, her hands pressed upon her breast; her face now deathly pale, now flushing scarlet; her mouth quivering with swift breathless sighs, half terror and half rapture; her eyes dilated with startled fear, like a roused deer's, yet lustrous with an unutterable tenderness, an unutterable glory.

'Leave me—leave me!' she murmured brokenly. 'I am base in your sight—I am worthless—for ever!'

For to her pure lofty instinct, to her innocence reared in simple stern creeds, which held honour a thing that a touch could attaint it, it seemed to her that he must have scorned her utterly ere ever he had sought her thus with the wildness of love: it seemed to her that because his kisses had burned thus on her, she must be debased in his eyes and her own for evermore. And yet with all this, beyond all this, there reigned over her her belief in him as the law of her life, the lurer of her fate, the saviour of her existence; and there stirred in her, imperious and exulting, the sweet, blind, tumultuous madness of the woman who loves and is loved.

He stood before her silent. His face was dark with riotous passion held hard in curb, yet it was changed to a surpassing softness and reverence.

He stood silent a while; how tempted, how assailed, his own heart alone ever knew.

Then his hands touched her and drew her to him, and his eyes gazed into hers.

'But—as my wife?'

Those brief broken words were all he said; it was his life, his honour, his world, the fame of his race, the repute of his name, that he gave her. Great gifts need slight phrase.

CHAPTER XLI

SLAIN.

Within a day or two from that time he married her, by those special laws which can be convened by gold.

In the humility of her intense love she had resisted him; she had pleaded that she was not worthy; she had entreated him to pause. But she could not withstand the force of his persuasion and the yielding of her own heart. And she became his wife.

Denzil and old Margett were the only witnesses of the marriage, and for a while no others knew it. His fortune was so close to ruin, his affairs were so deeply entangled, that the declaration of such a union at that moment was impossible. So—bitterly against his will—he let her remain on his stage a while, and the town was left in ignorance of the relation that he bore to her.

Perhaps the tie had greater sweetness to them both because thus untold; the ecstasies of passion seemed yet more exquisite because seized from the midst of the world's brilliances and levities. When their eyes met across the crowded theatre, their secret was dearer because unprofaned by publicity; when the laughter and gaiety of others were about them, their hearts thrilled at a chance word or a chance touch from each other, with purer rapture because their secret was unguessed.

Pshaw! Why need I dwell on what no words can paint They loved; they were undivided. In that brief phrase the uttermost passion of life's one perfect joy is told.

The hours fled apace. The spring grew into summer,

and the summer grew languid with odorous heat. Three months drifted by; months filled, for her, with colour, with melody, with public homage, with brilliant scenes of pleasure, with sweet, dreamy days in the heart of blossoming woods, with hours of proud eloquence and lofty triumph, with the voluptuous trances of passion, and with the divine visions of love.

The last nights came, on which alone the public would ever behold her. With the height of summer the theatre closed: she loved the art which she followed; but his will was her law, and he had forbade her ever again to give the loveliness that was his to the eyes of a multitude. To go seaward awhile; to wander in those southern and eastern lands of which her bright fancy had dreamed, and whilst absent, to let the knowledge of his marriage be given to the world, was the future he promised her: there were now [illegible]x nights left betwixt that promise and its fulfilment.

On one of those nights there came to the royal place in the theatre a woman who took her seat there as though she were in truth a sovereign, her bosom and her hair blazing with the deepest lustre of sapphires, her fan flashing thousands of small diamonds in the light each time it stirred, her great, slumbrous, brown eyes watching the stage incessantly with a scornful laughter just stealing under their heavy amorous lids. To and from her box there passed continually half the 'gilded youth' of the town; at the back of it, timidly hiding in the shadow like a chidden child, was a boy of ruddy cheek and simple air, who started now and again like a shy frightened hare: none noticed him; all passed him; he was her husband.

I shuddered as I saw: it was the same face that had glowed from the canvas of the Cléopâtre.

She spoke little: people would have said that she was devoted to the stage. She sat there almost motionless, gorgeous in the glare, nothing moving but those great dusky sleepy eyes, that glanced hither and thither over the house under their drooping lids.

Many present knew that her thoughts must be with the time when she, who sat there in her pomp and pride, had shown her half-nude beauty to the populace in the lowest pastime of the mime.

I alone knew that her thoughts might drift back to a still further season, when she who sat there, covered with jewels that were heirlooms, had envied the strolling players of the village-booth their spangles and their gewgaws.

Whenever Gladys was upon the stage this one gazer never withdrew her eyes from it, and they lost their laughter, and grew cold, intent, studious.

Wider contrast she could scarce behold to herself anywhere on earth, Perchance she felt it, for I saw her brow lower, and her red full lips tighten as though with a quicker drawn breath.

It might be that she felt—even as others did—that before this lofty, poetic, soul-lit loveliness her own voluptuous splendour was hard, sensual, earthly; for, look up from the diamond to the planet, what will you then see of heaven in the gem?

For me, I trembled as I saw that baneful presence there.

Looking on her as she watched thus, I thought of a glittering, jewelled, ruby-orbed snake, reared motionless to watch the grace of a lithe-limbed, soft-eyed, and unconscious antelope—motionless, but ready to strike.

'Did you see that woman's eyes upon me?' Gladys murmured as they drove homeward. 'She whom they say was "Cléopâtre?"'

'Yes, I saw them,' he answered simply.

There were things in his life that he loathed,—now that he loved.

That night in her sleep she moaned with a restless fear and awoke trembling.

'I dreamed of that woman!' she cried; 'of that woman!'

'My love, my love,' he murmured, 'what can harm you, dreaming or waking, whilst I live?'

And she sighed softly, and fell asleep again on his heart,—content.

On the following night he did not come into the theatre as usual: she drove homeward immediately that the great play ended. She seemed anxious at his absence, the more so because she had not seen him since the noon of the day; and she sat awhile in her chamber, feeling sleepless and ill at ease.

The night was very hot; the casement stood wide open, looking out on to a mass of moonlit myrtle and syringa

leaves; the heavy scents of dew-laden roses came up from the garden below; it was so still that all the starlit peace of some hill-sheltered country might have stretched around, rather than the countless roofs of a great city's fashionable outskirts.

She sat beside the window; the white folds of some loose *négligé* floating about her; her rich hair lying on her shoulders, gleaming to a dusky gold in the low lamp-light; her throat and chest half bare as the wind stirred her dress; her eyes looking out on to the dark, dewy, still night, with those dreams in them that only the happy dream. And her happiness was to her still a thing so breathless, so strange, so entrancing.

A church-clock somewhere without tolled midnight. As the last stroke sounded through the hot summer hush of the darkness, a man's step came up the stairs; the door opened, and he entered the chamber. She rose and went to him, with that beautiful flush and radiance which ever came on her face at his presence; and in his embrace there was a strange strength of passion rather like that of severance than of meeting,

'What has chanced?' she asked quickly, with the swift instinct of love, looking upward to his face, which had lost somewhat of its habitual colourlessness and calmness, and had warmth, and unrest, and almost eagerness upon it.

His eyes gleamed darker, and his lips quivered a little as he answered her:

'This, my love,—that I am rich once more!'

Her own eyes grew full of a tender surprise.

'Once more! But you have been so always, surely?'

He smiled.

"My child, I have been nearer to ruin than I cared to tell you, or than I care to remember now. For some years past I have had the worst sort of poverty, Gladys,—the poverty of a man who has rank to uphold, and self-indulgence to satisfy, and who has dissipated his heritage in pleasures which have palled on him, though he cannot yet bring himself to break with them. I have been as near ruin as a man may be whose good name has not been lost or jeoparded. But there is no need to think of it now. I am rich once more. I can command the world for you!'

She looked at him still in wonder: to her he had ever seemed even as a god in power and in possession.

'What is your joy, is mine. But for the world,—it is here for me,' she answered him softly; and she pressed his hand to her breast, and bowed her head and rested her lips upon it.

He was silent; touched to passionate, dumb emotion. This man, whom his world believed indifferent to all tenderness, and callous to all devotion, felt a measureless gratitude to this creature who loved him for himself alone.

'All other women I have known would have had but one thought—how much my riches may be!' he muttered as he drew her to the couch beside the open casement, and sank down himself beside her.

'How lovely you are!' he murmured, as he moved back the heavy masses of her hair and watched the soft night wind stir amongst her dress, and drew her arms about him whilst he told the history of his new-born wealth.

The tidings had come but that day to him. A distant relative, old and childless, had left to him the whole accumulations of a penurious and solitary life; utterly unlooked for, undreamt of, because the dead man was of another branch of his family; one which had ever been at variance with the elder and loftier house. 'Because he is the head of my race, and because he never sought me, noticed me, even knew me, therefore I bequeath, etc.,' ran the strange testament; and the bequest was one, in lands and in gold, to place him amongst the richest and most powerful of his Order.

To all men such sudden heritage is sweet; to him, at this moment, it was precious, far beyond its actual and social worth. He could not utter his thoughts to her, for he had never let the phantom of the world's scorn come before her glad and innocent eyes; he had never let the shadow of the world's wrath fall across her sunlit, flower-sown path. But none the less himself did he know that it would need all the force of the fulcrum of wealth, all the massive weight of a great dignity and a great position, to compel from the world to her that world's honour without which both her life and his own would be poisoned and incomplete.

For, to the man who is proud and of pure lineage, it is not enough that he may know the innocence of his wife to be without soil; it is as the very breath of his life, that it should be unassailable by living lie or by dead rumour, and unapproachable as the stars on high. And, sooner or later,

the woman who learns that she has been suspected by the world will learn that, however deep her husband's love, or however imperishable his trust, there is one galled wound in his strength by which a passing touch can force his haughtiest pride to wince.

He knew this: she did not.

She could not comprehend the source of this vivid rejoicing which moved him at these tidings of his splendid inheritance; but she rejoiced with him, in all the sweet instinctive sympathies of love. And yet that humility, which is ever the companion of such love as hers, filled her with a vague sad sense of some unworthiness, of some unfitness, for such fortunes as his were.

'Perhaps it is not well that I should be your wife?' she said softly, whilst her face grew pale and her breath grew still, before that first shadow of a great unknown fear. 'My people were poor and obscure; and I have followed a public art for gain; and when I cease to pursue it, as you desire, I shall have nothing of my own. I should not have been your wife! There are so many women, great, beautiful, noble, worthy of your name: will you never wish that one of them—? I can only love you, I have nothing else to give!'

He stayed her words with his kisses.

'O, child! Cannot you see that, with wealth and the world mine, such love is all, lacking, that I need? My God! how can I declare to you my pride in you? How shall I make you believe what greatness and what purity your genius, your loveliness, your nature, your mind, will bring to my race and my name? Stay but three days more, Gladys, and the world shall see in what estimate I hold these, in what honour I hold you.'

She sighed, with a deep content.

'But will the world honour *you* for it?' she asked him, with that dim and wistful sense of some unfitness in herself that had but newly touched her, and was still so shadowy and so slight.

'It *shall*, my darling.'

In another hour the memory returned to her that, ere he answered her, he hesitated for a moment; and that, as he answered her, his eyes darkened and his brows contracted, as with the resolve to encounter, to compel, to vanquish.

But in that moment she only heard the assurance given; she only felt the clasp of his arms and the touch of his lips.

She rested against him long in the deep, sweet, stillness of a joy, too sure and too perfect to be broken by words.

Once only she roused herself and spoke.

'Shall I know your friends—your sister—then?' she asked, with that happy light playing in her eyes, as she lifted them to his in the soft obscurity of the night.

'I hope so, love.'

But I heard a short, impatient sigh from him as he spoke; and I knew that in his heart he was full sure that never would his sister's hand take hers in welcome and in friendship.

He was silent some time, his touch absently caressing the thick and gleaming waves of her hair. He had too true a manhood in him, and too haughty a temper, not to be ready to proclaim his honour of her to the world with all widest and highest publicity, and not to feel, with passionate sincerity, that pride in her—in her innocence, and her loveliness, and her genius—which he had avowed. But to every man it is bitter to know that the creature he delights to honour will be refused all honour by the world; to every man does it strike home, with a hateful pang, that the bearer of his name, the owner of his rank, the mother of his children, should be breathed on with the breath of libel and of imputed shame.

He knew the world too well not to fully appraise the cruel force of its incredulous contempt, its merciless censure; he had lived in it too long not to fully foresee the humiliations and insolences which it would be beyond all power of his to avert from the woman whom he loved. With time, indeed—and riches—he might be able to compel for her the lip homage of social respect, and to unclose for her the doors of the palaces of his order. But he knew that the work would be long—toilsome—and in the end but half accomplished.

For he knew that slander, having once seized on a fair name for its prey, does never altogether loose it; but, slumbering for a score of years, will yet, when it looks dead, have power still to lift its hydra head, and spit poison. And so he sat there, thoughtful, weary, and half sad; yet with a thrill of old, dauntless, chivalric gladness in him,

because to him it had now been given to show, at least in the world's sight, how high in honour he himself had held this life that trusted him with so supreme a faith.

Moreover, old aspirations stirred in him; old dreams arose.

Sitting there in the still summer night, with the light of the stars on the leafage without, and looking down into those deep, tender, soul-lit eyes, old fancies of his dead youth came to him. With gold, 'the compeller of men,' all things seemed possible to him. His wealth would be vast; his ambition might keep peace with it—a lofty and pure ambition, seeking the welfare and not the suffrage of men: seeking to rule and not to use them.

Of pleasure he had known every sense and satiety; of passion he had known every fury and folly; of the world he had known every bitter and every beguilement; a brief while ago his life had been tired, ruined, reckless, exhausted; but now—now in this soft midnight hour of summer—the fair and noble dreams of his boyhood returned to him, and it seemed to him that to give them fruition yet lay in his gifts and his destinies.

'You are thinking?' she said, looking up at him whilst her arms were about his neck. He smiled, and drooped his lips to hers.

'Yes. I am thinking of the future this day—and you—have given me.'

And I believe that those dreams abode with him in his slumber; for ever and again I saw a smile come on his face, as he slept, where the moonlight fell in upon it through the dewy foliage that half hid the casement.

Ah, God, that from some sleep men never awakened!

Early on the morrow he left her, compelled by some exigencies of his new possessions to be absent in the north two days.

There were but three nights more of her public career. He would fain have shortened even these; but the interests of many were involved, and with the true soul of the artist in her, she parted from her world of art with pain and almost with unwillingness; and she clung to these few remaining hours in which alone the genius in her would ever utter itself to the multitude, and feel and use its powers.

He feared that it would be impossible for him to return before midnight of the second day at earliest. He left her with singular reluctance, with longing regret, even for so short an absence.

Towards the close of that day she sat alone in her little library; without there was all the glow of a summer evening at seven o'clock, but within the violet hues of the room seemed like twilight. She sat lost in thought; a smile and a flush now and then crossing her face at some memory; her book had fallen to the floor; her head was bent; in her bosom some little scarlet love-roses were fastened.

She did not hear the sound of steps without; she did not even hear the soft slow unclosing of the door, and the sweep of a woman's robes over the velvet of the floor. Lost in thought, the deep, sweet, visionary thought of a love that is half-earthly, half-divine, she did not even feel that she was no more alone.

The woman paused and looked at her, herself unseen. Her great, brown, slumbrous eyes glittered like jewels; her ruby mouth curled with a cruel scorn; her teeth set slightly, like an animal about to spring. I knew her—thus had I seen her, though then obscure of beauty as a diamond still dull in its bed of quartz, look thirstily on the tawdry treasury of the pedlar's pack; thus had I seen her in all the haughty insolence of her shameful pomp when she had sat in her amber-hung casement, and mocked the poor, lowly, stainless life whose innocence and sublimity offended her.

She stood quite still, looking, looking, with the heavy lids dropped over her eyes; she was attired for some festival of the coming night; jewels glanced at every point upon her; a gold-hued, tropical bird was fastened against her breast, in its beak a flower of diamonds; with that scorn upon her mouth, with that gleam beneath her lids, with some gold-hued tissue, light as mist, about her, she seemed to me to burn with an insufferable brilliancy through the dusk as a tiger's eyeballs may flame through the darkness of an eastern night.

Suddenly Gladys felt, rather than heard or saw; felt that she was watched, and was no more in solitude; she started, turned her head, and sprang to her feet, erect.

For the moment she was speechless in surprise; for the

moment this woman's face was strange to her, telling no tale, bringing no history.

Avice Dare smiled where she stood. She had come unannounced, unaccompanied; admitted doubtless, through some bribe of her gold, or some awe that her rank carried with it.

'You know me?' she said carelessly, 'I know you. We are both on the world's stage.'

Gladys gazed at her, still silent with amaze; remembrance of the sole history that she had heard tangled with this woman's name returning slowly through the confusion of her shattered thoughts.

'I know you thus much,' she answered, her clear pure tones striking across the harsh voice of her questioner as the note of a silver bell may strike across the dissonant clangour of brazen cymbals. 'Thus much,—that your presence only is a dishonour. Why do you bring it hither?'

Avice Dare laughed aloud, with caustic insolent ease, and for answer sank on to a couch by the hearth, and leaned her elbow on her knee, her chin upon her hand, in indolent action of familiarity.

'Dishonour? are you a fool? I am what all women would give their lives and souls to be,—now. I came to look at you,—stand more to the light,—so! you are handsome enough!'

Gladys stood erect upon her own hearth, the last glow of the sunset falling upon her; her hand rested on the marble shelf, her eyes were dilated with a deepening amazement half touched with loathing and with fear.

She deemed this woman mad.

'Whatever be your errand,—say it and depart,' she made answer. 'Though you now were an empress, not less should I hold your life infamy.'

Avice Dare laughed once more; with one hand she played with the diamond in the mouth of the bird, on the other she rested her chin, whilst her slumbrous, ruthless glances searched out every trait of face and of form, of limb and of feature, in the living loveliness that faced her.

'My errand is to look at you,' she said curtly. 'Well, you are beautiful, though not in my fashion. You are a genius, they say. What use is that? I had only good

looks, and see where I am! Genius! Pshaw! what do *they* care for that? If you were an ill-favoured wench, though you had all the genius of heaven and hell, what would it serve you? You might die in a gutter.'

The voice of Gladys, with its proud serene utterance, rang again across hers:

'Do you come here to tell me this? It was not worth while. I know nothing of you, save that you have been one who destroyed the lives and the souls of men; I desire to know no more. I only bid you go.'

Avice Dare laughed aloud; her eyes glittered with a more sinister and savage meaning under the weight of their blue-veined languid lids.

'Destroy the lives and souls of men—know no more of me than that! Pshaw! what is that more than to know me—a woman? You speak fine and fair. I never did either. I am a dullard at their hearts and their learning. But I am no such fool but what I think,—sometimes. I think what fools and what beasts they are: maddened by the red of our lips and the white of our skins; ready to sell themselves to any devil, if we will only be theirs when they craze for us; flinging away all their gold, and their youth, and their good repute, that we may spurn them, or kick them, or kill them as our choice goes. I do think,—sometimes. I think what fools and what beasts they are. There is your lover—he was mine once.'

The face of Gladys grew suddenly white as death; she pressed one hand to her heart unconsciously, crushing the roses.

'Will you go?' she said, calmly still, whilst her teeth were tight shut. 'Or you will force me to summon my servants?'

Avice Dare bent forward, the golden bird glowing brighter, the diamond in its mouth shining with rosier light, the laugh in her eyes growing broader and coarser.

'Call whom you like. It is no news to the town, if it be news to you. It was only when I left him—left him because he was well nigh a beggar, and had dared to taunt me for having no talent—it was only then that he gave his theatre to you.'

'His!'

She echoed the word unconsciously in the stupor of amaze

with which this woman's words had stifled her. Some vague shape of some hideous truth, that loomed out from the gloom of hidden years, was all she had vision left to see.

'His,—surely his,—what of that?' retorted the sullen, scoffing, victorious voice, which in its moments of passion lost all the finer and purer accent of tuition, and lapsed into the rude and homely words of its birth-tongue '*His* theatre! You knew that well enow. It have always been his toy, to set up his fancy of the hour in, and make the gabies of the world run and stare to see a thing of wonder in his mistress. He's had it now a many year; and he've never had one as good in it as me, though he chose to dare and gibe me, and to say as I could only do the dancing. You were a girl he found in the streets, I've heard?—selling flowers and starving? And you'd a pretty face, and he took a liking to it; and he made a—lady—of you! It's his way; and it pays too. Nought draws like a handsome face to the stage. You are an artist, they say, and God knows what; I never did nought but dress and dance. But the town was mad about me as you. So was he. I pillaged him pretty well; but they do say as how you have ruined him out-and-out. A playhouse is a pretty toy enough; but it beggars men quick—when we help too! You live very quiet, and proud, and innocent like, they say. Well, it seems to pay you high that way; but you chose to talk about "infamy" a second ago. Now I have been honest, at least; while you—'

Her laugh filled up the pause; more brutally than by jest or gibe.

Gladys stood erect; her hand clenched on the marble; her face blanched with a mute breathless disgust; her lips dumb in her defence. An unutterable horror had seized her; in one instant all the truth, so long screened from her with such tender hands, was laid bare to her sight as the flash of the lightning lays bare the abyss.

For the moment she was speechless; her heart beat with a slow sickening effort that seemed to drain all strength from her limbs and all life from her veins; her eyes lost sight; her ears lost sound! a deadly faintness held her in its bonds.

Avice Dare watched her with a sleepy voluptuous cruel pleasure; even as in the old time gone I had seen her watch the lingering torture of a high-couraged, luminous-eyed

falcon, caught in a trap in a green beechen bough, and struggling passionately for freedom, all through the hours of a burning thirsty summer day, till death released it.

'Your eyes look strange; is this news to you?' she said coldly. 'Ignorance is odd enough, surely. If it is not his gold that you live on, whose is it? Does gold grow, like your roses? You were a beggar, without bread, without home, without a hope in the world; yet when you were lifted up into riches and ease you never asked whence the wealth came that did it! Faugh! what liar durst tell any baby such a fable as that?'

The foul word roused her hearer like a dagger's thrust; the sickly faintness passed away; the blood rushed to her face in a bright passionate flood; her eyes flashed fire; her whole form grew instinct once more with strength and gracious pride.

'Silence! Silence!' she cried, with calm contemptuous command. 'What my life is, matters not to you. It cannot come for judgment to your vile imaginings. Go, and let me forget, if I can, that lips so foul as yours have ever dared to breathe to me the name I honour only second to my God's.'

For one moment the low brutal nature of her antagonist was awed and cowed before the grandeur of that noble simplicity, the purity of that perfect faith; for one moment she in whom womanhood was but a base and venal infamy, saw by one fleeting vision how great by the divinity of love can womanhood become.

With the next instant, the evil in her scoffed to scorn that one relenting impulse.

It has been written that there is not one man without some gleam of tenderness and pity; it is not written that there is not one woman.

Her dusky, sleepy eyes flashed with a sudden stupid wonder.

'Is it true?' she said curtly; 'true, as some say of late, that you be his wife?'

Gladys answered nothing, but her face spoke. Where she stood, with her hands crossed upon her breast, and her eyes gazing against the sunset light, there was more eloquence than lies in words in that fearless dignity, in that conscious gladness and glory of a life which knew itself one with his for ever.

Avice Dare laughed aloud, gnawing with her ruby lip the diamond which the bird bore.

'So-ho! you have done worse by him than ever I did!' she cried, her hard exultant voice ringing through the soft sweet silence of the chamber; 'I have done it by another, it's true. But *my* dupe is a witless lad, too great a fool to know what honour is. But yours!—Nay, hear me out. I have little to say, but I'll say that. I know him right well: he's a fool in his gifts, and a devil in his pride. Like enow you've drawn him on to give you even his name, out of pity. But maybe you've never thought how you've killed his pride in him for ever and aye. Do you know that the women of his rank would no more come nigh you than nigh me? Do you know that his world will say he has married his mistress, and that your sons will be taught, soon or late, to blush for their mother? Do you know that to live with you he must give up his order; and that, though you may carry its title, you will never pierce into its ranks? I tell you the truth; I've done the like myself. But I'm a "vile woman," you know; you—you're an angel of innocence! Well, you may be; you've a fair face, I see; and you hold yourself rarely and loyally. But look you here. When, through you, he is the scorn of friends and the jest of fools; when for you he gives up his old world, and his own race; when by you he has children who can be taunted by schoolmates with your name; when for you he lives beggared, restless, half obscure, shunning the eyes of the world because of the stain the world thinks that it sees on his scutcheon; *then* he will find little choice, I fancy, between my "infamy" and your "innocence." You are his wife, no doubt; your eyes say so, though you stand dumb. Well, he will never tell it to you, because he is a gentleman born; but as sure as he lives, so sure will the day come when in his soul he will curse you for the selfishness that you cloaked in purity, for the cruelty that you masked in love. I am a bad woman; yes, but I was never so base to him as you! I only took his gold; I never stole his name!'

Then, without another word, she passed across the chamber, the gleam of her golden tissues flashing on the gloom.

On the threshold she paused one moment, the brutal smile gleaming on her full red lips.

'We go to see you act to-night; you will scarce be at your greatest, I fancy!'

And the door closed on her slow hard mockery of joyless laughter.

Gladys stood erect on her own hearth. A mute, breathless, numbing horror stole over her face, and blasted the light from her eyes, and drained the life from her veins. She gave no cry, no sign; she did not move; her eyes still looked out steadfast at the light; and yet, ah, God! to see that horror in her face was to behold death seize a living, happy, sinless creature in the first fair radiance of its beauty, in the first sweet summer of its years!

* * * * * *

Eight of the evening chimed softly through the silence. It was the season when the world claimed her. She had flung herself on her knees beside her couch, and still kneeled there with her head bowed upon her arms, though more than an hour had drifted by since the words of her destroyer had echoed through the stillness of that peaceful place. At the sound of the chimes she started, and rose to her feet; she was white as marble; her breath came in slow agonized labour; her eyes had a bewildered tearless terror in them.

So brief a while before, a rapture so perfect had environed her—a passion so shadowless had entranced her; and now—the whole force of a hideous truth was round her like a web of fire.

She knew that in the world's sight she was a thing dishonoured, and that the reflex of such dishonour was the sole dower that she had brought her husband.

'To have harmed him—to have harmed him—O, my God!' That was the sole cry that was wrung from her. Before her sight, like an abyss on which the lightning plays, there spread all the depths of infamy on which she, unwitting, had stood in joyous ignorance so long, and all the undreamt-of wealth of pity, tenderness, and countless gifts that she had owed to him.

All things were bared before her; she saw herself the creature of his alms, the beggar enriched by his mercy, the debtor kept in blindness because vision would have shown her all her debt. She knew now why all the women of his race had held aloof from her; she knew now why the assurance of the world's honour had hesitated on his lips, and his promise of it been, not confidence, but defiance. Even in her ignorance—even when she had deemed herself the

creatrix of her fame, and the gainer of her gold—she had said ever in her soul, 'What shall I render thee, O princely giver?' deeming that the world could never hold fit payment to him. But now—now—she beheld the past in all its nakedness; and now she knew likewise that her only recompense to him was to take to him, in marriage, the imputed shame wherewith the world had laden her! With all the sweeping cruelty of bitterest truth, the words of her enemy had scourged her, till they cut the living flesh of her bared heart.

Without a thought that was regret, without a dream that was fear, without a vision of dishonour that could ever taint her, of repentance that could ever assail her, she had lived her radiant life until this hour. And now—now—she knew that though she should live to the extremest years of age, she could never undo the evil wherewith she had paid him back his good.

Baser and more self-steeped natures would but have seen that, come what would, her own place as his wife was beyond challenge and beyond change. But to her the knowledge that the wrong wrought to him could never be undone, though ever so passionately he should crave his freedom—though ever so wearily he should lament his loss—was an agony greater than any woe or martyrdom she could herself have borne.

'If only he were still free!' she cried aloud in her torture. 'If only I could be his servant—his mistress—his dog—so that the world should honour him still!'

For to her, in the deep humility of her passionate gratitude, it seemed that there was nought in herself to recompense him for his surrender to her of his honour and his troth: to her, in the high, pure, stainless creeds of her old grave poetic race, it seemed that to have lived upon his gold, though all unwittingly, and to have been libelled by his world, though all unrightfully, took from her for ever all fitness to the place and to the name of his wife.

She was but a child, still; she was a poet, she had the pride of lofty creeds, she had the self-abandonment of a love that was absolute in its idolatry; she saw nothing, felt nothing, heeded nothing, save that she was shameful in the sight of the world, and that she had paid a measureless debt only by acceptance of as measureless a sacrifice.

One thought only folded her in its poisonous net, as the fire folded Glauce. The thought that she had dishonoured him—dishonoured him!—she, who would have given up her young life to any torture or to any death, to spare to him one moment's pang, to save to him one breath of scorn!

It may be, that if in this hour his voice had fallen on her ear, his kiss had touched her lips, this paroxysm might have passed, this horror might have unloosed her. But he was absent: there were none near to counsel or to soothe; she was alone with all this brutal truth that rose before her, all this sense of irrevocable ruin brought on him by her love.

And in such an hour she could not reason: she could only suffer:—suffer those tortures of hell which on earth only come to the innocent.

* * * * * *

The eighth hour sounded.

She started to her feet. She knew that the public waited her.

'O God! I cannot go!' she murmured 'I cannot!'

Her head fell on her breast; her white lips gasped for air; the crushed roses fell on the ground—dead.

But that moment passed. She had the courage of the soldier; the endurance of the martyr. Such women have. It was the fulfilling of his appointed place; it was the execution of his appointed duty.

On a side-table near there stood a flask of rich amber-tinted wine, that he had left there in the early day. By sheer instinct she poured it forth, and took deep draughts of it; it was rarely that she ever touched wine; its stimulant revived the warmth in her veins, quickened the dull uncertain beating of her heart, restored her for the hour to strength and consciousness.

'She shall not see me fail,' she muttered in her teeth. 'She shall see what force his love and honour give.'

Then she rang and bade them tell her people she was ready, and went, with a calm step and all her old grace of bearing, to the carriage that already waited at the accustomed hour. I followed her; she was not sensible of my presence.

The horses flew like the wind; it was already late; I looked up at her face in fear and trembling: it might have

been cut in marble, it was so still, so fixed, so colourless. Her eyes still held that look of breathless pain, and her heart beat so loudly that I could hear the throb of its heavy and irregular pulse above the sound of the horses' hoofs, and all the manifold and confused noises of the busy streets.

The simple gold of the marriage ring was hidden under a weight of other jewelled circles on her slender hand; she drew the jewels from it, and looked at it with a strange passion, half glory and half horror.

It was the sign of her honour amidst women, it was true; but none the less did it seem to her the sign of his bondage, of his sacrifice, of his degradation in the sight of the world.

'They must not know: they must never know,' she murmured: and she put back over it the gemmed rings that screened it from others' eyes.

What she would do in the future she knew not; she only vaguely felt that never, by the derision of the world for him, should the honour of the world be purchased for herself.

The carriage flew through the lighted town, in which the glare of the gas crossed the lingering light of the glad summer evening.

It paused before the familiar place where the world waited for her.

'If they see that I suffer, they will say evil of him,' she muttered half aloud; and the meditative calm came back into her eyes; her colourless mouth wore a proud resolve; her head was lifted with a haughty grace: as she passed the people in the passage to go onward to her dressing-chamber, I heard one stranger say to another:—'Is that fair-headed woman the actress? Heavens!—she might be an empress by her look!'

It was later than the appointed hour; the house called for her, growing impatient; there was not a moment to be lost. She robed herself hastily, and swept on to the stage with slow, graceful, negligent dignity, whilst the homage of the crowded theatre rang out again and again in their acclamations of welcome.

She looked once at the house; there, true to her words, her enemy was throned; seated laughing amidst her courtiers, as Faustina sat beneath the purple canopy of the

Antonines to watch the gladiatorial show upon the blood-steeped sands below.

The amber tissues glowed around her, till she seemed bathed in light, and the golden bird in her bosom held his diamond in the light, as though in symbol of the sole wage for which the wise amidst womanhood sell love.

Her eyes met those of Gladys; they were full of the same merciless exultation, of the same sleepy, brutal, and voluptuous pleasure. As the noble courser answers to the barbed cruelty of the spur, so did the high courage of the creature that she tortured answer to that tigress' glance. The blood flushed to her face; strength rang in her voice; eloquence and inspiration returned to her. She played with yet more consummate art, with yet more dauntless genius, than the world had ever beheld in her. For she played to justify his love; she played to save his honour; she played, not for the world, but him.

I felt a strange fear as I watched her: I knew not why.

It seemed to me that the force of her self-command was too great, the fever of her strength too high, for the victory not to cost her some fatal price ere it should utterly be won.

And—at those times when she was no more in the public sight, but waited in the solitude of her chamber, my terror grew: for that deathlike whiteness of her face never changed, and I could see and hear the laboured beating of her heart, as though the youth and vital gladness of its pulse were crushed and suffocated beneath the weight of deadly knowledge.

Yet still she moved with a grace so exquisite, with a power so matchless, before the assembled multitude! She held them entranced as even she had never held them. When their cries rang to the roof, they were no empty or careless homage, but the tumultuous fury of a people moved to passionate and rapturous emotions. And where her enemy sat, with the golden bird nestled in her bosom, and the brutal triumph in her eyes, the eyes glanced with furtive doubt, and the wicked lips curled with an uneasy smile—her prey escaped her; her hate lost its sting.

The end drew near; the strain was well-nigh over.

As she went once more before the sight of the people I knew that the ordeal would soon be passed, the victory be soon accomplished, if—if—she had strength to endure to the last.

She went: and the echoes of the public acclamations greeting her again rolled in their muffled thunder on my ear where I waited in the loneliness of her little chamber.

Suddenly the door unclosed: Beltran himself entered. His return had been earlier than he had deemed possible.

He glanced round the empty place, and left it hurriedly: I heard his step die away down the long corridors which led to the public portion of the house.

I went forth from the chamber, and stole to that familiar corner where I so often had tarried to watch the play of the stage, and the crowds of the house. He, I saw, had passed amidst the audience, and was standing in his sister's box with his head bent to her. The theatre was hushed into intense stillness; some woman's sob, some man's deep-drawn breath, alone quivered on the silence; the listening multitude was held in the trance of sympathy in which genius can hold a world at will.

She was alone upon the stage; it was that supreme moment in the tragedy wherein the woman, whom she portrayed, learned that the love which she had deemed divine as heaven was but a thing of desolation and dishonour.

She stood erect, her hands crossed on her breast, the white folds falling about her limbs; the gleam of her hair like light above her brow; her eyes gazing out upon the upturned faces of the crowd beneath her feet with a mute blind anguish which chilled them as though they looked on death.

Her voice thrilled through the house with a strange, sweet, unutterable passion in it that brought tears to the eyes of those who heard—all meaning of the verse she spoke was lost to them, they only felt the meaning of that music of the voice, sad as the last sigh of a dying child, passionate as the last look of love in eyes that never more will meet on earth.

One alone in all that vast audience—one alone, her destroyer—knew what memories were in her thoughts, what truth was in her utterance, as the words of the poet left her lips:

> 'I thought to give him honour,
> Liberty, fealty, peace—and all fair things
> That make men's lives divine. And, lo!
> The only dower that I take is shame.
> My arms entwining him will sap his strength,
> My kiss beget disgrace on him. My love—

The only gift I ever had to give—will be
Dishonour and corruption in men's sight.
The harlot's jeer, the hired jester's gibe,
And all the mockery and malison of tongues,
Will now hoot at him and drag down his name
Through the foul mire of their public ways.
And I—I—I, his slave, his love, his wife,
Shall take him moral death and endless infamy.
Ah, God!—'

The breath paused on her lips; the words were broken and ceased; her gaze had fallen upon him where he stood amidst the women of his order in the centre of the lighted house, and in that one moment of sudden recognition the world about her died from her sight; and all she saw were those eyes, familiar and beloved, that smiled on her.

Her strength snapped like a bow overstrung. Her senses sickened and grew dull. With a faint cry she stretched her arms out to him, and reeled, and fell.

The curtain sank, and hid her from the public sight.

Through the tumult of the panic-stricken multitude there ran the awe of one dread murmur—'death.'

In one moment he was beside her; he scattered the people like sheep; he seized her in his arms, and bore her through the open-doors of the supper-chamber where in other years the boy-statesman had fallen dead upon the hearth because a woman, vile of soul, had kissed him, and betrayed him.

Some fled in terror to seek succour; others huddled in terror on the threshold; about him his friends gathered, helpless, horrified, aghast, afraid.

He never spoke; but as he laid her down and threw himself beside her, he tore aside the lace and linen off her bosom, and sought to feel and listen for the beating of her heart.

Its pulse was still.

He flung himself upon her; he called her name with every caress of words that passion holds; he covered with his kisses her lips, her bosom, her limbs: he crushed her in his arms as though in his horror he could seize her and withhold her from the brutal ravishing of death.

The warmth of that burning embrace, the fire of those quivering lips, gave back for one fleeting moment a pang of movement to the numbed and strengthless heart; gave

back a flush and glow of life to the langour and the coldness of the feeble blood.

Her eyes unclosed, and looked at him with that perfect love which never again on earth would come to him.

'The world need never know it—now,' she murmured. 'Kiss me once more—O God! O love! forgive!—'

And with that prayer for pardon on her sinless lips, she feebly turned, and wound her arms about his neck, and drooped her head upon his breast, and sought his lips with hers.

In that last kiss, her last breath fled.

He, who so long had known no grief, and smiled at every pang, grew like a madman in his agony; he drove forth from the chamber every human creature, and barred the door upon them, and spent the watches of the night alone —alone, save for that beautiful dead thing that he had loved; alone save for the gold of the heavy hair, for the calm of the closed eyes, for the caress of the lifeless lips, which stirred no more beneath his own, for the loveliness of the cold limbs and of the pulseless breast which thrilled and flushed no more beneath his touch.

All through that night I saw the deadliest sight that the world holds;—the despair of a strong man.

When, with the full light of day, his friends broke into the room, in terror at the silence that had lasted there from midnight unto noon, they found him stretched upon the hearth; his head upon her chest, his hands clenched in her loose hair, the full sun falling on her fair dead face and through the festal chamber of so many nights of mirth.

When they raised him they saw that her breast and hair were stained and wet and red—he had ruptured a blood-vessel, the dark stream had gushed from his throat and he was senseless.

CHAPTER XLII.

VALETE.

I HAVE not heart in me to dictate more.

There are many things that I thought to chronicle. I have many adventures left untold, many portraits left un-

sketched, many memories left unrecorded. But I have not the heart in me to tell more now; and besides,—I am only to fill a certain number of pages.

Strange generation!—which has its literature measured like its yards of coventry ribbon, or its pounds of Cambridge butter! I suppose, however, that it is a good thing that there is some such ruthless restriction, for, Heaven knows, without it poets or autobiographers might spin on at the wheel of their vanity for ever: for the thread of Amour Propre is a thread without an end, and tough as it is endless. In vain do the world's sharp scissors of scorn snap at it and cry, 'Hold, enough!'—the thread is of stuff indestructible, and it only thinks that the scissors are jealous!

Since that awful night I have never quitted Beltran.

His life was long in jeopardy; but with time his strength prevailed. Those who care not for life commonly have life cling to them.

He never knew the truth of that early death. Men of science agreed in their judgment that her heart had been long feeble of action, and at length had suddenly given way; it is a disease not rare with those of vivid mind and delicate frame.

There was no one—nothing—which could reveal to him the secret of Avice Dare. For I could not bear witness against her.

Gladys' grave was made in the old green country of his birth, amidst the sepulchres of his ancient and stately race. This was all the honour left for him to yield to her. By that grave the world learnt that she had been his wife during that one, sweet, short summer-time.

One day I saw Dudley Moore stand by that simple tomb, almost hidden in the white blossom of roses, and his hard, cynical, keen eyes were dim with tears, the first that had ever dimmed them since they had seen the light.

From that night the theatre was closed. It can never more bring ruin to any, or echo with the laughter of a crowd. It has been razed to the ground, and on its site stands the poor-house.

Beltran does not heed that I am near. But I can watch him, follow him, guard him in his sleep—it is enough.

I ask no more. I am only a dog—I dare to love, I dare not even seek to be loved in answer.

Ah! when your poets have painted the fidelity of woman, they have found its likeness on earth, perhaps,—in their dog.

He leads the old life in the world. Why not? If all men in whose hearts lives a dull, abiding grief, whose throbs death and death only ever will still, deserted for desert or ocean your world of fame and of fashion, how strangely that world would look! How much eloquence would be dumb in your senatorial chambers; how many a smile would be missing from your ball-rooms and hunting-fields; how many a frank laugh would die off for ever from your ear; how many a well-known face would vanish from your clubs, from your park, from your dinner-tables, from your race-stands!

And how seldom it would be those that you had pitied who would go!—how often would the vacant place be that place where so many seasons through you had seen and had envied, the gayest, the coldest, the most light-hearted, the most cynical amongst you!

Ah! let Society be thankful that men in their bitterness do not now fly as of old to monastery or to hermitage; for, did they do so, Society would send forth her gilded cards to the wilderness.

He lives the old life in the old world still. He could not dare to trust himself to solitude. Solitude!—sweet to the youth who first suffers; to the poet who finds in his thorn-crown his aureole; to the lover who is half-enamoured and half-proud of the pangs that devour him; sweet to those. But to the man of the world, to the man past his youth, to the man whose last hope is dead with his last joy and last passion—solitude would be but the gate of the mad-house.

He is in the world,—of the world; the great fortunes that have come to him bring the world about his feet. The man who is nobly born, and lately enriched, can have of the world what he will—except happiness.

'He is a man without a heart!' I heard a mother murmur, whose daughter he would not woo. 'A man without a heart, and he has never loved. There was a beautiful young actress—his wife, we learned later, whom he had driven into public life to maintain himself in the

days of his ruin—and she died on his own stage from his cruelty; and look! how utterly he has forgotten her now!'

Forgotten her! Heartless!

When they—they who are many as the woes and sins of the earth are many—whom he seeks out with unceasing patience, in their manifold sufferings, their innumerable needs, look up in his weary passionless eyes, and bless him for aid, for bread, for existence itself, given to them by a mercy which the world never dreams of—they know whether he is heartless.

When, in the stillness and darkness of dawn, I watch him pace his chamber, sleepless and haunted by a ghost that will not leave him with the rising of the sun that day, or any day, in all the years to come—when I see him fling himself upon his bed as the morning light streams in, and see him writhe in his agony, whilst the great tearless sobs shake his frame in the torture of a memory that can never die while he has life—I know how he has forgotten.

Well—it boots little to dwell on this.

A '*vie manquée!*' says the world, when it speaks of him, re-calling the old fair promise of the talents of his youth.

Is there any threnody over a death half so unutterably sad as that one jest over a life?

'*Manquée!*'—the world has no mercy on a hand that has thrown the die and has lost; no tolerance for the player who, holding fine cards, will not play them by the rules of the game. '*Manquée!*' the world says with a polite sneer, of the lives in which it beholds no blazoned achievement, no public success.

And yet, if it were keener of sight, it might see that those lives, not seldom, may seem to have missed of their mark, because their aim was high over the heads of the multitude; or because the arrow was sped by too eager a hand in too rash a youth, and the bow lies unstrung in that hand when matured. It might see that those lives which look so lost, so purposeless, so barren of attainment, so devoid of object or fruition, have sometimes nobler deeds in them and purer sacrifice than lies in the home-range of its own narrowed vision. '*Manquée!*'—do not cast that stone idly: how shall you tell, as you look on the course of a life that seems to you a failure, because you do not hear its '*Io triumphe*' on the lips of a crowd, what sweet dead dreams, what noble

vain desires, what weariness of futile longing, what conscious waste of vanished years—nay, what silent arts of pure nobility, what secret treasures of unfathomed love —may lie within that which seems in your sight even as a waste land untilled, as a fire burnt out, as a harp without chords, as a bird without song?

There are but three more things that I will tell you—now.

In the spring-time of this year I was in Paris. It was a beautiful brilliant night in the height of April. The chestnuts were full of bloom; the air was full of fragrance; there were a million stars above and a million lamps below; lilacs and hyacinths filled the balconies and casements; there was the sound of music and of laughter everywhere.

I was curled on a satin cushion in one of the supper-chambers of a great gilded house, where all that is lavish, and brilliant, and desolate in the city is wont to come. My friends had come thither after the opera; one of their guests was a great actress, with a wondrous dark beauty, and the luminous eyes of the East—a woman of many passions, of many follies, of many talents, of many caprices, yet of many virtues; a woman whom they called always Mariquità.

After a while, the supper ended, she moved a little away from the table and went out on to the balcony and sat there, leaning her arm on the gilded rail, and glancing at the crowds that stirred beneath the boughs below. One man followed her and sat there too, away from the laughter and glitter within, in the cool of the night, amongst the white and purple hyacinths that filled the place, and with the quiet stars above.

It was very still there; it was late in the night, and the street beneath was scarcely seen for the leaves of the limes and the hyacinth blossoms.

'You do not love me, Denzil,' she said suddenly, when she leaned in the shadow, with her diamonds gleaming as they caught the rays of the moon.

He answered her simply, 'No.'

She looked at him with a curious, steadfast, dreaming look; whether she loved him or not I never knew. They played at love together.

'You are frank!' she said at last, with a smile; 'and you are very singular!'

'No doubt. But you may as well know it—years ago I loved one woman so well that I never shall love another.'

'Ah, how like a man! you can never love; and yet—you have a thousand passions!'

He flung his cigarette into the street.

'What has that to do with it? Nothing!'

She watched him curiously for a while.

'Where is she?' she asked at length.

'God knows! If I knew, do you think I should be *here?*'

The dark magnificence of her face paled under all the scorn of the answer uttered. She was used to have the world at her feet, and the passions of men at her will.

She was quiet long; then she spoke:

'Listen, Denzil, you write stories that the world read; I will tell you one that the world never knew.'

He listened listlessly, leaning against the balcony, wearily watching the ebb and the flow of the street crowd beneath, under the linden boughs. From within there echoed the noisy laughter and the banal wit; out here the stars were shining.

She told him the story; it was one that I had known. He heard indifferently, striking alight another cigar, with his handsome dark head bent down in the moonlight.

When she had told it, she drew a little amulet-case from her bosom—an old worn leathern thing, though hung on to a necklace of onyx—the same case into which I had once seen placed the fragment of the paper that she had found in the death-chamber in the Quarter of the Poor.

'Here is the letter,' she said, taking out of it a folded sheet torn. 'I never showed it to any before. I do not know why I do to you. Only—see how women love.'

He took it indifferently still; but as he saw the writing, he started and grew deadly pale; he read it by the white clear moonlight, read it to the end. And as she watched him she trembled, and was afraid, she, the famous and fearless and reckless woman, was afraid, with a terrible fear of this memory that she unwittingly had awakened.

She seized his arm in terror.

'O God! what have I done?'

He looked at her with a look that she will never till her

dying day forget, though she live to the extremest years of age.

'Done, done? Nothing that I know, only—it was I who loved her!'

The laughter echoed from the supper-room, the sounds of music floated on the air; through the open window the lights of the chamber glowed; beneath the leaves the crowds were passing to and fro; from within the gay outcries of the women of pleasure challenged his return: and he stood there in the moonlight with the letter in his hands, only hearing a voice for ever silent, only seeing a face for ever gone.

And thus the dying words of Gertrude D'Eyncourt came to him at the last.

A little while latter, more in the summer-time, leaving Paris itself, we tarried a brief while in one of those charming places in its precincts that lie hidden in those woods which still seem to echo with the careless laughter, and breathe out the amber perfume, and murmur with the mocking love, of the dead Règne Galant.

I was left entirely to myself, and wandered as I chose about the woods. One day I strolled afar; and there seemed to come to me a strange familiar feeling from the low level meadows, the lines of poplar-trees, the fields of colza, and the grassy orchards which met my sight. Gazing awhile, and awhile drawing in that sweet scent of red rich earth, of cool fresh air, of the breath of lowing cattle, and of the hearts of unfolding spring-flowers, I knew it then. It was the country of the Silver Stag.

Beside me there was a low wall overtopped with prickly golden furze; beyond this stretched an orchard, its grass all unshaven and daisy filled, its old tree-stems gray with the fairy-like leafage of lichens.

I crossed the orchard, knowing it well; here often I had rolled the wind-fall apples to and fro in play, and here had I often seen the homestead doves sway drowsily in the moving boughs.

It was evening now; the shadows were growing long; it was all still; there was only the singing of the birds; for whoso amongst you believes that birds do not sing after the

sunset-hour can surely have walked but little in the fields and woods.

I passed on to the garden full of lilac and of chestnut bloom; treading the ground reverently as the soil of a place that had given me shelter.

We are ever mindful of succour bestowed, of hospitality received; where we have eaten bread there do we ever go with remembrance and thanksgiving; we have not learned your art of oblivion, your science of neglect; we cannot turn upon the hand that once tended us food; we cannot make a mockery of the kindliness that once befriended us: we cannot emulate you there—we are but dogs.

Outside the porch, at a table of rough-hewn wood, under the old-remembered sign of the Silver Stag that swung above amidst the foliage, there sat a little group of student lads—lads with flushed happy faces and noisy ringing voices, who were breaking white wheaten rolls and jostling their glasses together.

They were served by a stout strong woman, with a scarlet kerchief bound about her black brows. Within the chambers there was noise, laughter, strange faces, the glimmer of candles, the sound of chinking glasses.

In the doorway there stood a burly and bearded man, in a gray blouse, and with a pipe in his mouth. At his feet a yellow terrier was worrying, and worried by, an angry cat.

In the wide vine-hung casement of what had once been the painting-room of the Faustine, the lattices were pushed back, and there a handsome dissolute girl with a velvet-tasselled cap on her head, and great ear-rings in her ears, and a square-cut scarlet bodice showing her bare chest. She was framed in the leaves and coils of the vine; and was calling out, and laughing back, to the youths at the table in the garden.

At a glance I knew that there were no more present in this place the brave forbiddance of vice, the sweet clear ways of household service, the cheerful grace, the perfect purity, the honest kindliness to man and beast, the order and the quietude that had reigned beneath this roof when Madelon and her mother had been sheltered by it.

As I gazed out from one of the leafy grassy ways that traversed the garden by so many paths, there came a youth who had been smoking in a little arbour formed by lilacs

that arched above a rough-hewn bench. He was grave of face, and clad in velvet; I recognised him as an artist who had used to frequent this place until in the year of the Faustine he had gone to Rome.

'You are landlord here—now?' he asked.

The man kicked the cat off the terrier, and assented.

'Where is Madelon Bris?'

The man kicked the terrier in its turn off the threshold ere he answered: 'Madelon Bris? She is in a religious order.'

'And the old mother?'

'Manon Bris? She is dead.'

'It was on the death of the mother that Madelon became a nun?'

'Eh? Yes: I think so. There was a day when Madelon went to Paris; and was taken ill there; and the old mother did not hear what had become of her for weeks, for months. People were kind, but old Manon fretted herself into her grave. When Madelon recovered of her fever and left the hospital, she found her mother dead. It was a shock, I suppose. Anyway—she took the vows. She is a Sister of Charity. Her hair was quite white when she came home; she looked quite old; I suppose it was the fever.'

He paused, and blew a cloud of smoke, and killed a night-moth fluttering near.

'She is living still?' the artist asked.

'Ay—for what I know. When the cholera raged last year she worked very hard, I heard, and, they do say, saved many: as if by a saint's miracle.'

'She was a saint herself,' the painter murmured. Have you the living things she cared for?—the birds, the dog?'

'The birds are here; at least the fowls are; all but the doves. I wrung their necks because they made such a noise. They were very good in a pasty.'

'And the dog—Russ?'

The man blew smoke into the air with a sullen shame upon his bloated face.

'He was here when I came. She was trying for leave for him to go to the convent. But he was always howling for her, and growling at us. So I got a fowling-piece, and shot him. He was very old, you know,—and savage. It was only safe to put him out of the way.'

The artist turned from the porch without a word, and went down the path, and out by the little gate: I stole away, sick at heart, back through the wood and the meadows.

From the broad, vine-hung chamber where the Faustine had glowed into life, the laugh of the wanton, where she leaned from the casement, rang out on the stillness of evening; and the drunken, gay shouts of the students echoed over the leafy, silent, shadowy garden places, where, in his glad and gracious youth, the lips of Carlos had murmured of eternal love, and with the golden drowsy noons, and with the dewy summer nights, his dreams and hers had in belief beheld imperishable passion and immortal fame.

The other day I saw in your London a grand equipage sweep by me.

Within it, shrouded in ermine, was a woman whose broad, slumbering, brown eyes gazed with a hard, exultant scorn at the sun, as though to say, 'Shine you on any more victorious thing than I?'

Beside her was a boy, with her look, though not with her beauty; who, holding in his hand a jewelled whip with a long white lash, curled the lash round the naked shoulders of a little tattered child of his own years, and laughed as his carriage rolled on, and the street-waif's shrill moan struck the air.

His mother laughed also; proud as the tigress when her whelp first tastes blood.

The boy was the heir to the Marquisate of Isla.

So great races decay, more foully than by poverty; and when the Mob curses the Noble for some act of greed, of tyranny, or of vileness, ten to one that it curses its own kith and kin, which, by base stratagem or illicit love, has foisted the cur's heart into the lion's hide.

Truly is Avice Dare amidst those of whom the Teacher of Galilee said, 'Verily they *have* their reward.'

Her young lord, dull, spiritless, cowed before her look as a slave before the scourge, drinks deep to find the death that his stubborn strength keeps at bay; and meanwhile grants all she wills to one whom he has learned to fear with

the keenest emotion of which his feeble nature is capable. She has incalculable wealth, immeasurable luxury, possessions at which even her avarice halts satisfied; and all the power of a great race against her cannot shake her or her son from their stronghold.

Society holds aloof from her indeed; but with her riches she can summon crowds of courtiers, flatterers, and parasites. Moreover—she has become devout; has built a church, endowed a hospital, confessed a converion. Cant, naked, is honoured throughout England. Cant, clothed in gold, is a king never in England resisted.

A bishop has not dined with her yet, but one will do doubtless ere long,—and then it will be possible enough that society will follow the apron, and consign to oblivion her antecedents.

From the hour that she sold me in the little street of the town in the Peak, she has been a woman with but one talent; but that one talent is worth all the powers and graces of genius; it is the talent to use the age in which she lives.

Genius is oftentimes but a poor fool, who, clinging to a thing that belongs to no age, Truth, does oftentimes live on a pittance and die in a hospital: but whosoever has the gift to measure aright their generation is invincible—living, they shall enjoy all the vices undetected; and dead, on their tombstones they shall possess all the virtues.

It is thus well with her: meanwhile—

At the time when the warmth of the summer just touches on the ruddier, fresher weather of autumn, in the time when the flowers of summer are still blooming everywhere, but autumn is felt in the brimming fulness of waters and the cool fragrance of winds, I found myself this year in my home-country of the Peak; in the land where the altars of the Druid still stand on the moorland; where the murex-stone of the Roman still lies on the hill-side; where the pine and the fern fill the hollows and dells: where the woods are ever damp with the dews of earth-born waters; and where the old tongue of Shakespeare's England still is spoken in old-world houses and in brake-hidden huts.

Fate took me for a brief sojourn at a great mansion in that district; and one day as I roamed among the lilac heather and the great plumed bracken, straying into a shady

lonely dale, filled with stone-pines and fed by running brooks, with a shock of memory I felt that I was once more near my birth-place.

Once more I found my way through the old dim forest place, where the timid leverets fled at my coming, and the pretty stockdoves were dabbling their rosy feet in the freshets, and the water was bubbling, and dripping, and murmuring everywhere, under ground and above ground, and the great horned cattle were lying asleep hidden amongst the huge stems of the burdock. It was all so still; so quiet; so strangely familiar; the very kine, as they lifted their sleepy heads from amidst the broad green leaves, looked old remembered friends.

With little trouble I found my way—for dogs never forget—to the little cottage, standing all alone, clothed in its rose-thorn; with the dusky woods shelving above it, and farther yet on high the slope of the wide moor flashed with the delicate crimsons and the deep lilacs of the heather that blent in that one soft melodious hue for which there is no name—a hue that glows in northern skies at sunset, as it glows on northern lands what time the heather blooms.

My heart was beating fast; memories thronged on me; old affection stirred: and yet—beyond all—there was a curious dull depression on me, a sense of irrevocable loss.

I felt that Ben was gone.

The sensitive nerves of our organisations feel the coming of woe as plants feel the coming of storms: when your hound moans on the hill-side, be sure that the dangers of the hills are near; when your mastiff, howling, prays of you not to venture forth into the night, take warning that the snow will drive all wanderers to their grave; or that the swollen waters will sweep down the bridge and all who cross on it; or that above the wold the thunder-clouds are gathering; or that behind the hedge the ejected peasant hides with pike and musket; or that in some shape or another Death will walk abroad that night.

In the early years of your world your race, dwelling in forests and on plains, alone with the earth and the sky, was swift to read portents and warnings; and to this day the genius of the Savage, in the divination of signs and the smell of the tempest or of the foe afar off, ever laughs to shame and to scorn the baffled brain, and the muffled ear,

and the purblind eye, of the civilised man. For, mustering in cities; ceasing to watch the things of the earth and the air; keen of pursuit for gold alone; environed in a web of artificial needs; burnishing the learning of the mind, but neglecting the instincts of the emotions; you have lost this faculty of the prevision of woe, as you have lost the nomad's power to trace the step that has yet left no prints upon a sun-baked path, and to scent that the air is pregnant with the storm though the heavens smile with sunniest light. You have lost it, but we retain it—greatly to our hurt.

With sickness of heart I drew near the little cottage. The rose-thorn was all red and white with its summer interchange of rosy berries and white star-shaped blossoms. The brown brook ran underneath the grasses, glimmering golden in the sun. The old gray lichen, and the green wet mosses, clothed the stone wall, on whose topmost coping grew tufts of harebells glistening with dew.

The wide door stood open to the light, and amongst the great yew boughs above the roof the little birds were moving, and were murmuring, with tireless wing and ceaseless song.

Nothing was changed, and yet—I knew that one change was there.

On the threshold stood three figures: two were girls ruddy, well shapen, poorly clad, with sunburnt arm, and with bare feet. The third was the old, gray, bent, tough figure of the pedlar Dick o' tha Wynnats; before him, on the stone sill of the door, was his pack thrown open: and once more I heard his thin cracked wicked voice that was persuasive in the ears of maidens and of women as the subtlest and sweetest music, because it ever brought flattery to their vanities and temptation to their senses.

'Now, my dearies,' he was crying to them in his wheedling, coaxing tones, spreading out before their round wondering eyes his ribbons, and his laces, and his jewelry of brass. 'Look'ee here! These arena goods to threap.* Ye'll busk ye'sells rarely wi' 'em, my wenches. And wi' wake time sae close tew 'ee, ye mun want a new bit of finery to dight ye up a bit. Eh? yer daddie'll niver say naught; for sure ye're kaded† as niver lasses was. Dew

* To argue about.

† Caressed, spoiled: a pet-lamb in the Peak is called a 'kade.

iver he gar* ye dew whatna ye dinna like? I wouldna fang a farthin' o' yew gif I werena weel sure as yer old feyther be allus sae glad to pleasure ye. Ye're pratty as pratty can be—leastways when ye're prankt up wi' a bit o' dress; a' yew wimmen want dress; a'out it ye're ony like poor speckit hens that hanna a top knot, an' are ony good for nestin' and broodin' out o' sight. Look'ee, my dearies, I hae hitten on tha very things to grace ye; jist these ribbons for yer bonny black hair, and this length o' lace for yer bonny white brists, an' these sparklin' stones to glower i' yer ears—'

But I turned away, sick at heart, and sure that my old lost master no more was there; and the rest of the pedlar's speech died away out of my hearing as I slunk back to return through the wood.

I left him there, in the sun on the threshold, holding up his glittering trash before the sight of the two country wenches; and coaxing them to buy and to wear, with all the old wheedling wicked wiles wherewith he had beguiled Avice Dare.

Of a surety the world that stretched outside the woods and the hills of the Peak had no better caterer for the food of its sins than wily Dick o' tha Wynnats, who bought the frail female souls with a glass bead and a penny ribbon that he might sell them again for his own profit of a silver piece and a quart of ale!

O Love! what offence hast thou done to mankind, that on thy mighty name should be charged the guilt and the vice that are daughters of Avarice, of Ignorance, and of Vanity?

I left them, not bearing well to see that once beloved little lowly home in the occupance of strangers, and found my road through the breadth of the pine-wood to that farther verge of it where the forge of Ambrose the blacksmith had stood.

On my way I passed the limestone quarry where Ber. had been wont to labour, and where I had spent so many a summer-day.

I suppose they had ceased to work it; for already down its white jagged sides the grass and the bluebells were growing; already in its crevices the ferns were waving, and

* Compel.

in its dells the sheep were grazing; the joyous deep-toned voice of Trust no more rang from hill to hill and called the straying lambs to fold; and where the blows of the pickaxe, and the laughter of the men, and the roll of the heavy wagon-wheels, once had roused the echoes of the woods and rocks, all now was silent.

I left it, quiet there, with only now and then the low pathetic bleating of a mother-sheep waking the stillness all about: and wandered on through the maze of the pine stems, and over the soft carpet of the mosses and mountain-grasses sown with shining millions of fir-needles, and growing ruddy now and then with the tiny fruit of the wild strawberry.

It was a long way, but I found it. The forge was standing there, with the red light of its fire blinking through its square ivy-hung window; and over its half-door the smith Ambrose was leaning. It was high noon, and he was at rest awhile. The little garden before his house was very trim and green with its high walls of box, and its thickets of white and red currant, and its one great walnut-tree that rose in a stately pyramid of leaf.

On the wooden bench under that tree, on which the men about were wont to rest whilst he within shod their horses, there was a tattered dark-eyed gipsy sitting now. I knew him again; they had used to call him 'Daffe o'Sough Tor,'* and he had been a favourite with Ben, as with the other people of the moorside, for his docility, his vivacity, and his droll waggish ways. He was accustomed to wander over the whole north country far and wide; but the place where he loved best to dwell was in a wattle hut made in a cavernous cliff of the Sough Tor, a large mass of rock overhanging a deep small sheet of shadowy reedy water in this wood.

Ambrose had just supplied him with a draught of milk, and a half-loaf of rye bread, and was leaning over the doorway in converse with him. I had no dread of poor Daffe, for he was, unlike most of his kind, very honest, and given to harming no living thing; and I went near, and hid myself under a burdock leaf, and hearkened to their speech.

For awhile it brought me no knowledge: it was speech of oxen and of horses, of harvest and of fruit, of folk-lore and of the northward wanderings of Daffe in the past year;

* The fool of the cliff by the pond.

but I listened on—seeking news of him, feeling the sure presage that there would be but one kind of tidings that ever would reach me of my best beloved and earliest friend.

And it came at last,—the story which all things had seemed to tell me, from the soundless wood, and the grass-grown quarry, and the threshold on which the strangers stood.

'Ye hae niver took na wife, Ambrose?' said the wanderer Daffe.

'Na, na,' answered Ambrose simply.

'Sure one 'ud ony frush ye,' asserted Daffe thoughtfully. 'Ye ha gotten a so tidy an weel reddup; an' gif she were a slattern,—most o' 'em mawthers is.'

'There be tidy wenches for as wants 'em,' said the smith; 'but for mysell—sister Ruth, as wed wi' Isaac Cliffe o' Friggat Mill, and her wee uns, be fam'ly enow for me.'

'Theer wur time as 'e thoct otherwise?'

'Theer be times as all o' us dew—e'en yerself, Daffe, tho' ye're so gi'en ta rovin' an reivin'—'

'Ay,' assented Daffe, and he was silent a moment, when he sat under the walnut-tree, with a grave dreamy light in his wandering eyes.

'Ben Dare, he be dead?' he asked suddenly. 'They telled me so by Darron's side.' *

Ambrose bent his head silently.

'When wur't?'

'Last simmar-time, i' th' aftermath.'

'It were a ston' as killed him?'

'Ay,' said Ambrose, softly shading his eyes with his hand from the sun that streamed through the aisles of pine.

'How wur't?'

'They was a blastin'. He'd allus thoct as he'd dee that way, ye know. They pit mair pooder i' quarry than common; and the ston' it split, and roared, and crackit, wi' a noise like tha crack o' doom. And one bit on 't, big as ox, were shot i' th' air, an' fell, unlookit for like, and dang him tew the groun', and crushit him,—a lyin' richt athwart his brist.'

'An' they couldna stir it?'

'They couldna. I heerd tha other min screech richt tew

* The river Derwent.

here, an' I knew what it wur, tha shrill screech comin' jist i' top o' tha blastin' roar; an' I ran, an' ran—na gaze-hound fleeter. An' we couldna raise it— me an' Tam, an' Job, an' Gideon o' the Mere, an' Moses Legh o' Wissen Edge, a' strong min and 'i our prime. We couldna stir it, till Moses o' Wissen Edge he thoct o' pittin' fir-poles underneath—poles as was sharp an' slim i' thur ends, an' stout an' hard further down. Whin tha poles was weel thrust under we heaved, an' heaved, an' heaved, and got it slanted o' one side, and drawed him out; an' thin it were too late, too late! A' tha brist was crushit in—frushed flesh and bone together. He jist muttered i' his throat, "Tha little lass, tha little lass!" and then he turned him on his side, and hid his face upo' the sod. When we raised him he wur dead.'

The voice of Ambrose sank very low; and where he leaned over his smithy door the tears fell slowly down his sun-bronzed cheeks.

'Alack a day!' sighed Daffe softly. 'Sure a better un niver drew breath i' the varsal world!'

'An' that's trew,' Ambrose made answer, his voice hushed and very tender.

'He was varra changed like,' murmured Daffe, his hand wandering amongst the golden blossoms of the stonecrop. 'He niver were the same crittur artur the lass went awa'. He niver were the same—niver. Ta seemed tew mak an auld man o' him a' at once.'

'It did,' said Ambrose brokenly. 'He couldna bear tew look na tew spik to nane o' us. He were bent i' body, an' gray o' head, that awfu' night when he kem back fra' the waking. It were fearfu' tew see; an' we couldna dew naught. Th' ony thing as he'd take tew were Trust.'

'Be dog alive?'

'Na. Trust he'd never quit o' Ben's grave. He wouldna take bit na drop. He wouldna be touchit; not whin he was clem would he be tempted awa'. And he died—jist tha fifth day arter his master.'

'An' the wench? Hev' 'ee e'er heerd on her?'

'Niver—niver. Mappen she's dead and gone tew. She broke Ben's heart for sure; long ere tha ston' crushit life out o't.'

'And wheer may he lie!'

Ambrose clenched his brawny hand, his eyes darkened, his swarthy face flushed duskily.

'Wheer? What think 'ee, Daffe? When we took o' him up for the burial, ta tha church ower theer beyant tha wood, the passon he stoppit us, a' tha gate of tha buryin' field. The passon he med long words, and sed as how a unb'liever sud niver rest i' blessed groun', sin he willna iver enter into the sight o' tha Lord. He sed as how Ben were black o' heart and wicked o' mind, an' niver set fute i' church-door, and niver ate o' tha sacrament bread, and niver not thocht o' God nor o' Devil; an' he wouldna say tha rites o'er him an' 'twere iver so, an' he wouldna let him lie i' tha holy earth, nor i' tha pale o' tha graveyard. Well, we couldna gae agin him—we poor min, an' he a squire and passon tew. Sae we took him back, five weary mile; and we brocht him here, and we dug his grave under them pines, and we pit a cross o' tha bark to mark the place, and we laid old Trust, when he died, by his side. I were mad with grief like, thin; it were awfu, ta ha' him forbad Christian burial.'

'Dew it matter?' asked the gently Daffe wistfully. He had never been within church-doors himself.

Ambrose gave a long troubled sigh.

'Awee! at first it seemed awfu'—awfu'! And to think as Ben 'ud niver see the face o' his God was mair fearfu' still. But as time goes on and on—I can see his grave fra' here, tha cross we cut is the glimmer o' white on that stem ayont, —it dew seem as 'tis fitter like fer him to lie i' tha fresh free woods, wi' tha birds a' chirmin abuve him, an' a' tha forest things as he minded a flyin', an' nestin', an' runnin', an' rejoicin' arount him. 'Tis allus so still there, an' peacefu'. 'Tis blue and blue now, wi' tha hy'cinths; and there's one bonnie mavis as dew make her home wi' each spring abuve the grave-stone. 'Bout not meetin' his God, I dunno—I darena say nowt anent it—but, for sure, it dew seem to me that we canna meet Him no better, nor fairer, than wi' lips that ha ne'er lied to man nor to woman, and wi' hands as niver hae harmed the poor dumb beasts nor the prattlin' birds. It dew seem so. I canna tell.'

As the words died off his lips the sun fell yet more brightly through the avenues of the straight, dark, odorous

pines; sweet silent winds swept up the dewy scents of mosses, and of leaves, and of wild hyacinths; and on the stillness of that lonely place there came one tremulous, tender sound. It was the sound of the mavis singing.

'I canna' tell; but for sure it is well with him?' said Ambrose; and he bared his head, and bowed it humbly, as though in the voice of the mavis he heard the answer of God:

'It is well.'

Ah! I trust that it may be so for you; that the sweetness of your arrogant dreams of an unshared eternity be not wholly a delusion; that for you—although to us you do deny it—there may be found pity, atonement, compensation, in some great Hereafter.

L'ENVOI.

'My dear,' says Franfreluche with supreme scorn, and her nose in the air over the last of my proof sheets, 'I don't think much of your Memoirs; and I can't say that there is any moral to be deduced from them, except one—'

'And that is?' I asked anxiously.

'That there is nothing on earth satisfactory except—A GOOD DINNER.'

I think she is right; and my consciousness that in an earlier chapter I did my best humbly to add my small quota to that study of human happiness which lies in the great Art of Dining, alone sustains me under the rashness and the vanity which have led me to offer to the world of letters the adventures and the philosophies of your very obedient servant

Puck.

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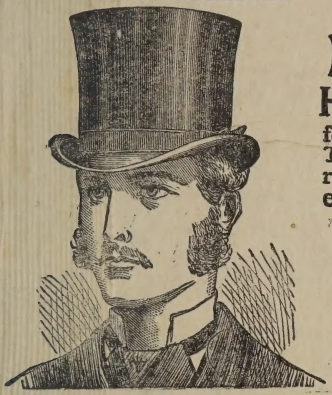

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